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ISSUE 51
December 1991
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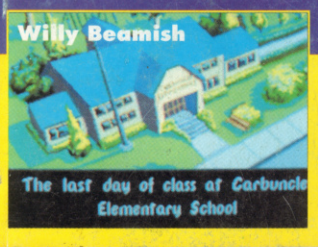

Exclusive ROBOCOP 3

Ocean Breaks the Movie Conversion Mould

IN THE WORKS:
Myth and Shadowlands - Exclusive development pictures inside

PREVIEWED:
Dune, Turbo Charge, Wolf Child, Suspicious Cargo, Indy Heat, Under Pressure and many, many more!

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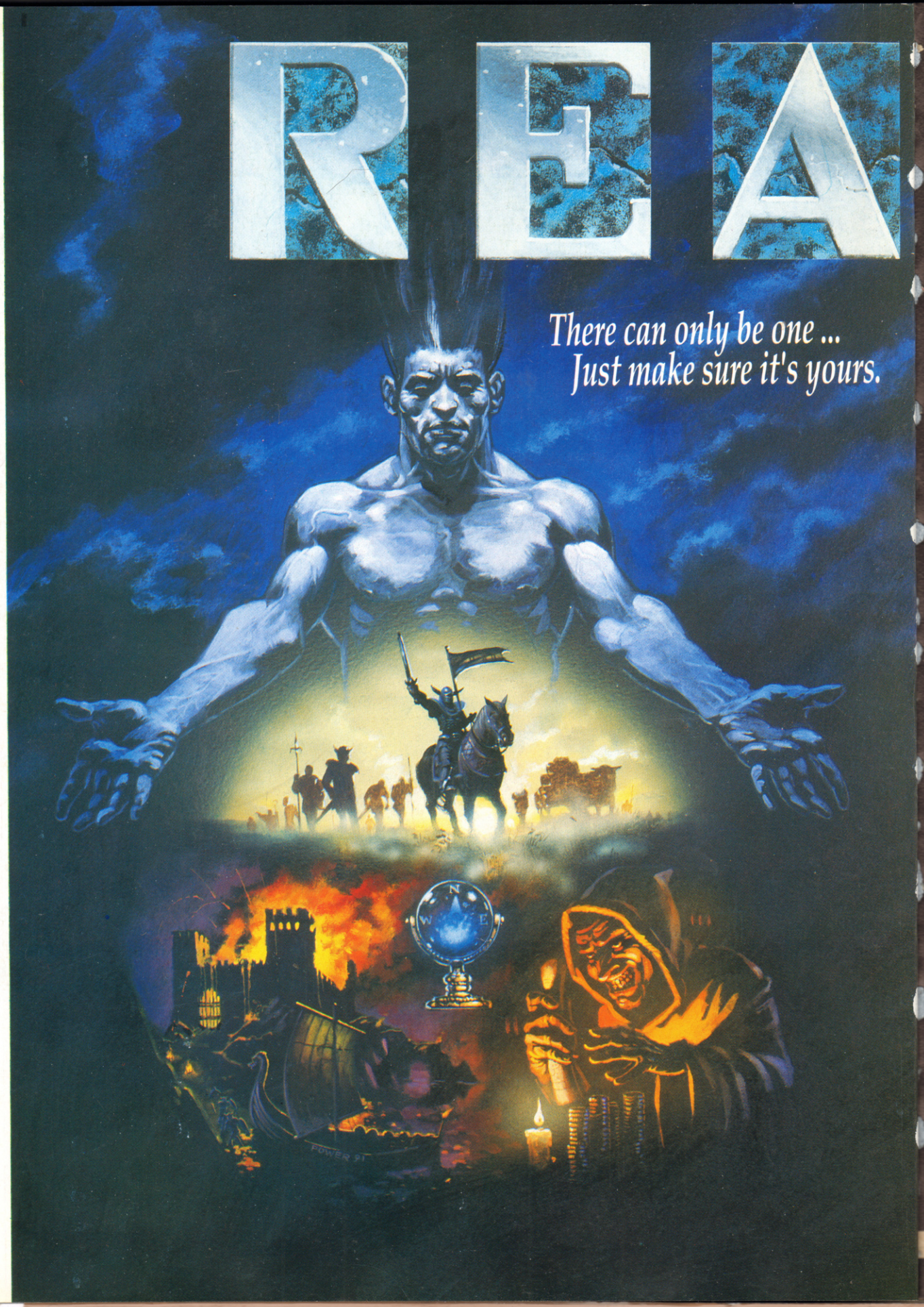
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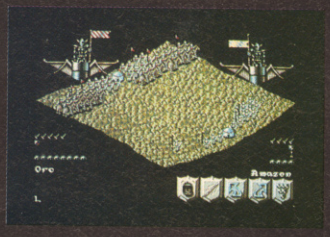

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ACE

No.51 DEC 1991

What - as one is supposed to write in these leader-style things - a month it has been! With this month effectively being the last "boat" setting sale for the utopian land of the Christmas Number One, we've been fair swamped by software. Nevertheless, we've carefully pondered and weighed up the quality of this month's releases and selected six titles to which we have devoted special six-page attention (see opposite).

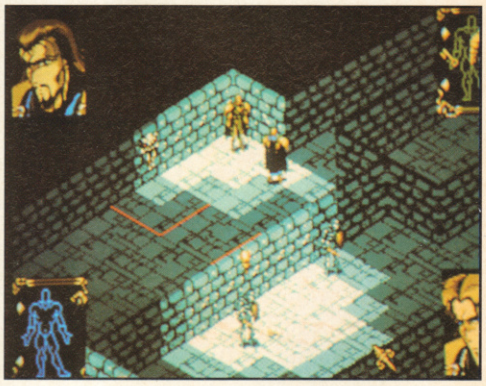
And in order to provide a breadth of information unavailable elsewhere in the computer press, every other game that has come under our inscrutible gaze has been rated in the Reviews Directory beginning on page 99.

Oh, and there's an exclusive interview with the men behind the *Terminator 2* coin-op.

Most satisfactory.

21 There's no need to wait for a top-notch CD Gigadrive before you can play the film. It's all in the developers' approach, you see, and it may not be as far away as you think.

31 Teque, the team behind last month's impressive *Pitfighter*, are taking a break from licence conversions to work on their own original product, *Shadowlands*. A role playing game with innovative graphics techniques and a bunch of interesting puzzles, it threatens to steal *Heimdall's* thunder on its release later this year. Hmm.



There may well be no such thing as a free lunch, but there most definitely is such a thing as a free supplement. And unless you have been unfortunate enough to have chosen a violated copy of this month's issue, you should have already enjoyed the secret, personal pleasure of having an especially elegant example of the free supplement genre flop into your lap. And quite aside from its undeniable "freeness", it's got the added bonus of actually having some decent tips in there too. Do we spoil you or what?

Editor Jim Douglas. *Deputy Editor* David Upchurch. *Art Editor* Jim Willis. *Designer* Jenny Abrook. *Staff Writer* Gary Whitta. *Contributor* Lonely Rik Haynes, *Photography* Edward Park. *Advertising Manager* Mike Wills. *Senior Sales Executive* Tina Zanelli. *Advertising Production* Esther Rodd. *Publisher* Garry Williams. *Subscriptions* Apex House, Oundle Road, Peterborough, PE2 9NP. Tel: 0733 898100. *Colour Origination* Pro Print Repro,Barking Road, E13. *Typesetting* Pre-Press Ltd. *Distribution* EMAP Frontline, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2TR. *Printing* Severn Valley Press, Caerphilly. © EMAP Images 1991 No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publishers. *This month's cover illustration was produced by Kevin Bulmer, the man behind Ocean's* T2.

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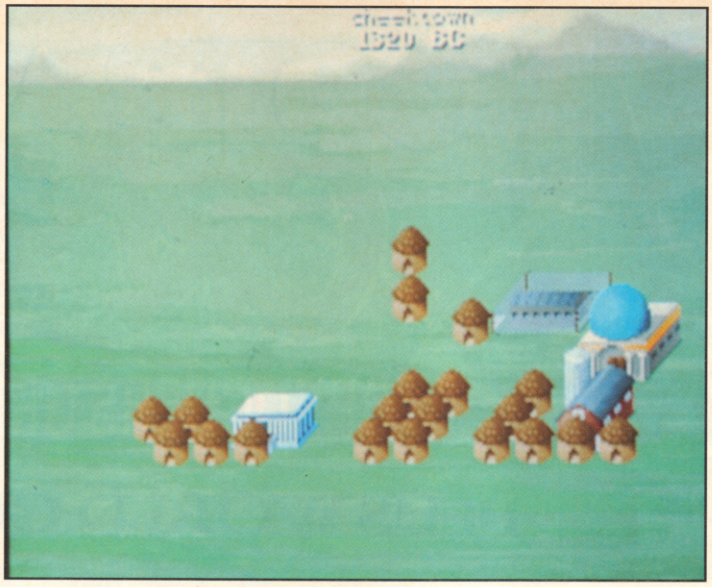
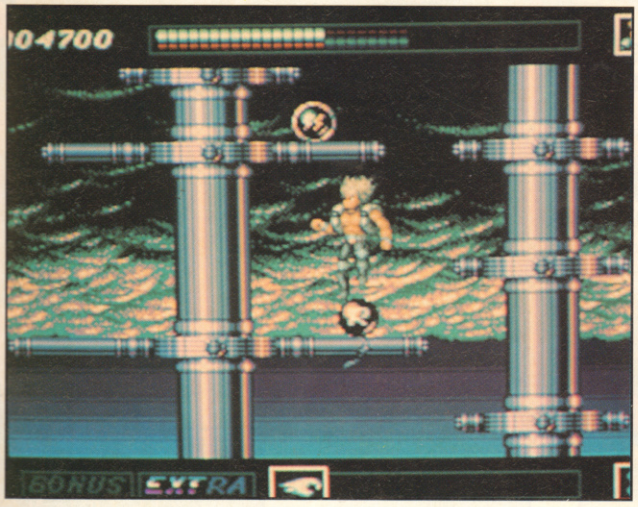


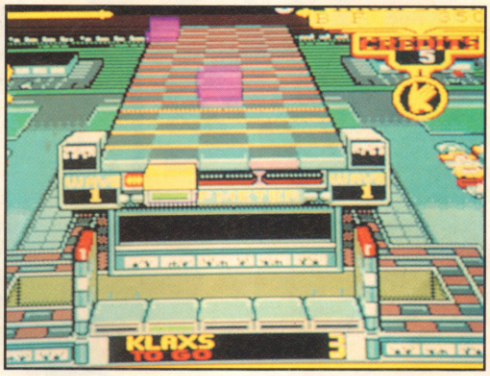
36 Remember *Myth*? Well now, finally, it's nearly finished. And you can blow us down if it doesn't look really rather good. Hooray!

43 For the latest news, views, how do you do's etc., you can always turn to Gary Whitta's "incredible" previews section.



56 Microprose may not be able to spell, but they sure can design a game! *Civilization*, the latest from strategy guru Sid Meier gets the six-page treatment.

87 Console owners have five reasons to be cheerful this month. And every one has a whole page!



7 Games News - Anonymous sources and exclusive scoops. **10** *Terminator 2* coin-op exclusive report. **15** Letters. **21** Special - Interactive Movies. **31** In the Works - *Shadowlands* from Domark and *Myth* from System 3. **43** Previews. **87** Console Section - Newest releases for your entertainment system. **96** Next Month. **99** The AwesomeReviews Directory Returns for a second month!

REVIEWS

AMAZING 6-PAGE REVIEWS!

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Heimdall
From some of the team who were supposed to be beinging you *Littil Divil*, *Heimdall* delivers innovative gameplay and fantastic graphics, all set against a lavish Viking backdrop.

56
Civilization
As publishers release ever more enormous games, it's becoming clear that we're rapidly approaching saturation point. Is it really possible to enjoy a game where you don't know where to begin?

62
Robocod
James Pond returns for more ferociously punning antics, but this time he's blossomed from an above-average novelty game into a grade A classic. Just *look* at those graphics!

68
Willy Beamish
Masters of detail Dynamix, fresh from their success with *Heart of China* take a considerably more lighthearted approach to their latest. This time it's an interactive cartoon. Gee-whizz!

74
Robocop 3
Having received some less than glowing reviews for their recent movie conversions, Ocean have taken a completely new tack for *Robo 3*. Not only is the game out before the film, but this time it's Polygons!

80
Smash TV
Probably the ultimate two-player shoot-'em-up, *Smash TV* is a dual-joystick carnival of destruction and mayhem. And you'd be a fool to miss it. Check out our in-depth verdict.

FOOTBALL CRAZY

3 OF SOCCERS GREATEST HITS!

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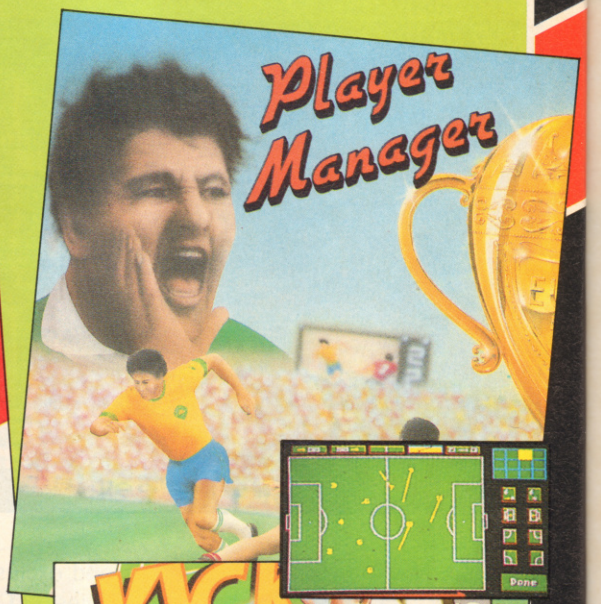

KICK OFF 2

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ST Action	- A stroke of pure genius.
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NEWS GAMES NEWS GAMES

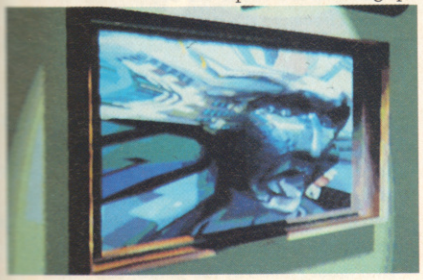
Maybe This Time...

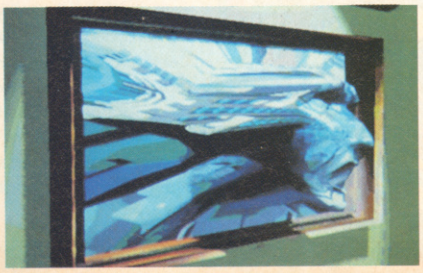
Yeah, we've heard it all before. A totally new form of interactive entertainment redefining the 'state-of-the-art'. These claims carry more superlatives than Barry Norman reviews of God-awful subtitled movies from the suburbs of Paris. Do they ever deliver the goods, though?

Now Virgin Games is aiming to change this poor pioneering performance with a stunning new game called Guest. Currently under development in the States, this mystery adventure will initially be available on PC CD-ROM format. A spokesman revealed that if Virgin Games ever released Guest on magnetic media it would fill a staggering 90 floppy disks!

The game itself reminded our reporter of Cosmic Osmo, an equally weird software showcase where players are encouraged to touch everything on screen and see what happens. If you get bored pushing things around in the massive mansion of Guest, you might like to involve yourself with the tragic plot which centres around a mad toy maker and the ghosts of the children killed by his inventions.

As you can see in these sneak screenshots from the game, Guest is shaping up to be something special. ACE hopes to bring you a full report next month.





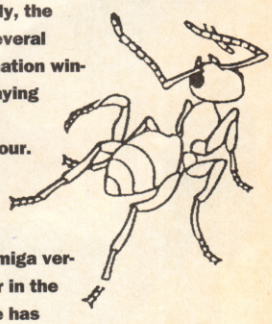
ANT NO STOPPING 'EM

Top Japanese publisher Imagineer has snapped up the Super Famicom rights to SimAnt, the innovative electronic ant colony, before any copies of the computer game have even been released.

The latest creation from Maxis, the company behind the phenomenally successful SimCity and SimEarth, SimAnt puts you in command of an ant colony out to conquer a seemingly quiet suburban residence. To reach the goal of taking over the backyard and ultimately driving the poor human out of his house, you must carefully manage the colony so that it grows and thrives.

In this epic campaign, you directly control one ant and supervise up to 1,500 black worker and soldier ants. These tireless little creatures can be commanded to perform tasks like gathering food, digging new tunnels and caring for eggs. Have you got what it takes to overcome the rival red ants, hungry spiders and other dangers that threaten your colony's survival?

To make the game both educational and entertaining, SimAnt designers Will Wright and Justin McCormick drew on a Pulitzer Prize winning book by two Harvard University biologists. Additionally, the game incorporates several Hypercard-like information windows that provide playing hints and scientific details on ant behaviour.



SimAnt is currently only available on the Apple Macintosh, PC and Amiga versions will follow later in the year. No release date has yet been set for the Imagineer console conver-

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

Have you ever wondered what happened to those classic coin-ops of the past? Yanks are known for their passion and interest in anything remotely historic, so they've decided to open a display of the most notable electronic amusements yet played.

The National Video Game and Coin-Op Museum in St Louis features 75 cherished creations including Pong, the simple bat and ball game that started it all, as well as titles like Space Invaders, Defender, Asteroids and Pacman.

Pinball machines also claim their place in the exhibition. Gorgar, the first talking pinball machine, was introduced in 1979 by Williams.

In case you hunger for a bit of video game history yourself, did you know Williams Bally Midway was founded by Harry Williams in 1942? Since it was wartime, he had difficulty obtaining materials to build new pinball machines. Williams therefore started to recondition old games using recycled materials. Seven years later, the Chicago-based company introduced Freshie, a flipper designed with a new 'tilt forfeit' feature. From then on, pinball punters who

Be A Visionary!

Are you having difficulty seeing the sneaky spaceship sprite in your favourite shoot-'em-up? This pair of high-tech style Magnatel Glasses provide a hands-free magnifying system for people who want to look 'cool' and with greater clarity. The adjustable optical lenses are controlled by dials on the side of the frames to give up to x3 magnification. "Designed by leading ophthalmic research specialists," goes the sales blurb, "they are ideal for watching sporting events, nature study, theatre and opera."

This crazy gadget costs twenty pounds and is one of the many on offer from Science Museum Brainwaves in Liverpool's Harrington Dock.

If you like the sound of the Magnatel Glasses or their Spaceship Umbrella, Bold Design Handkerchiefs, Micro Rice Pot, World Map Bow Tie, M.C. Escher Jigsaw Puzzle, Solar Powered Hat, Telephone Charge Checker, Haematite Earrings, Illuminated Pocket Microscope or Celestial Scarf, call (051 708 7383) to place your order.

By the way, this company is just around the back of the Psygnosis office. Will Shadow of the Beast 3 come bundled with a weird wid-

Sonic The Hedgehog Goes Missing...

Sega has unveiled the second video game in the System 32 series which features some of the most impressive hardware processors ever introduced into the arcades. Rad Rally is, unsurprisingly, a duo-player sequel to the respected Rad Mobile.

Sadly, although the excellent landscape graphics and intense gameplay remain, Sega has decided to drop the swinging Sonic Hedgehog on the windscreen. At least players can choose from four 'ultrarealistic' race courses incorporating speedy highways effected natural phenomena like rain, fog, lightning and, of

A RED HOT ACE EXCLUSIVE!

While ordering a Super Mario Bros Happy Meal at the local McDonalds, our intrepid toilet cleaner at ACE Towers managed to uncover some highly confidential information about the next Nintendo video game courtesy of a guy in charge of the fries.

According to Mr X, Super Mario Bros 5 will be an enormous time travelling extravaganza. As a bonus, the game should incorporate the previous four adventures completely intact!

He confirmed the talented Nintendo development team from Kyoto in Japan were extremely tired after clocking up a lot of overtime putting the finishing touches to the new Zelda eight-megabit cart for the Super Famicom. Apparently, these poor fellows couldn't decide how to invoke their all important cheat mode. Should they go for a straight A, X, B, Y fire button configuration on the title screen or shock players with a highly innovative, but user friendly, system hidden in the second level behind the inn on the edge of the village?

Four times larger than previous games, Zelda will be released in time for Christmas. Mr X reckoned Super Mario Bros 5 would arrive sometime later next year on the Super Famicom with a Gameboy adaption likely to follow soon afterwards. It's just a

Slipping Into Top Gear

The creators of Gremlin's best-selling Lotus race-'em-ups have been exceptionally busy over the last few months. Not only have they crafted a sequel for Amiga and ST gamers, but they've also produced an adaption of the gameplay for the Nintendo Super Famicom.

Published this month by Kemco in Japan, Top Racer is a split-screen racer with eight stages set over various locations around the world including Tokyo, London, San Francisco and Sheffield. You have the choice of driving four different types of cars, each with their own performance and handling characteristics. The trick is to pick the car most suitable for the next type of track and environment. To keep things playable, you can drive with a set of proper gears or go fully automatic.

"We really wanted something that you get straight into," confirms the programming team. "Getting speed out of the Super Famicom is difficult because it's got a slow processor. We're really pleased with what we've managed to squeeze out of it."

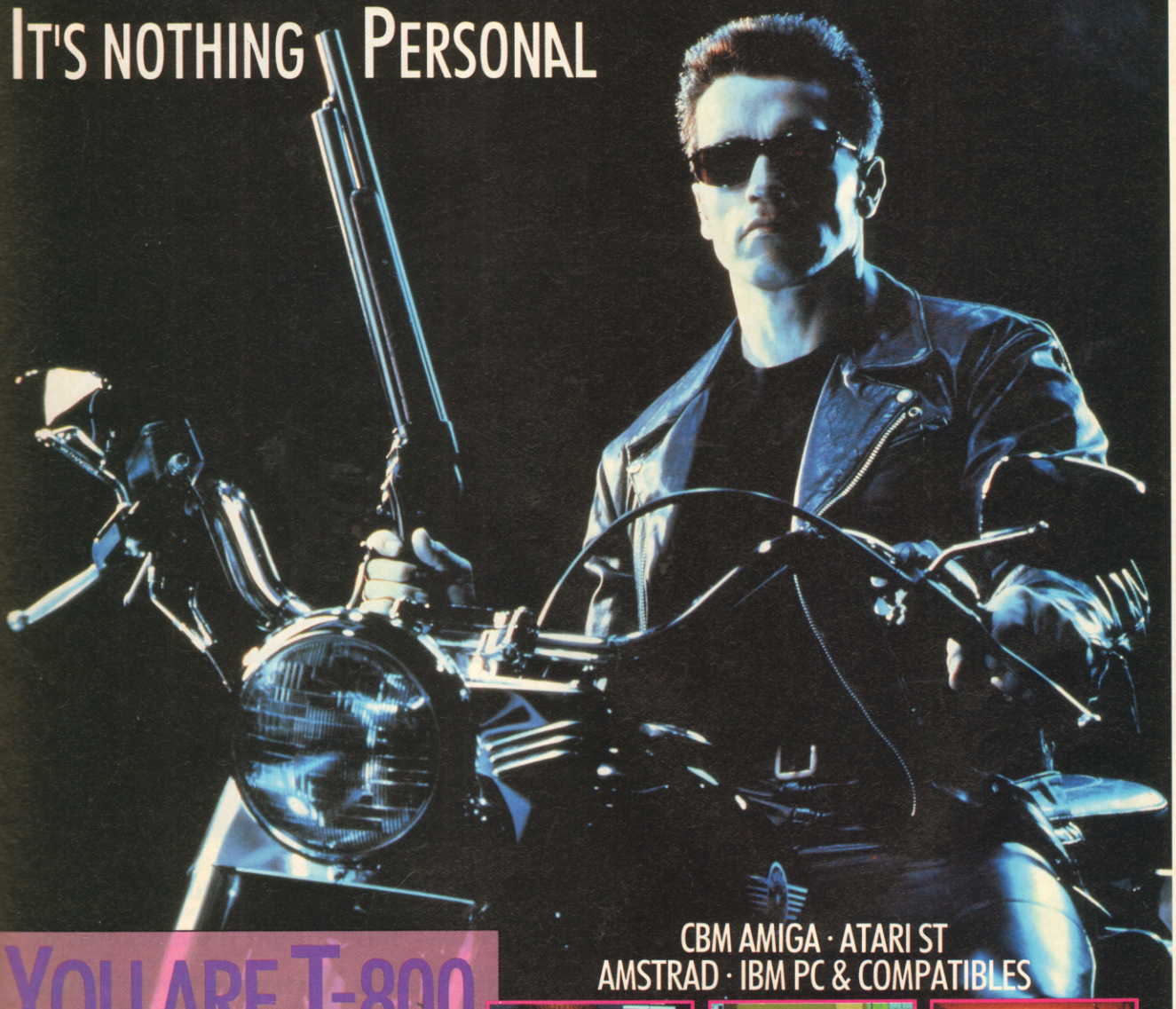
Not only does the background scenery change during each race, but there's also night driving, multilane highways, dirt tracks, hills, bridges and tunnels to master. If you try one of the steeper courses like San Francisco, you could struggle with your revs, stall your car and actually roll backwards down a hill.

Like most games of the genre, Top Racer comes alive when played against another human opponent. If Nintendo releases a ComLink for connecting two Super Famicom consoles together, Gremlin may consider writing a sequel allowing four-player competition similar to the feature in Lotus II. Further enhancements could also include fog effects and customise car options.

TERMINATOR 2™

JUDGMENT DAY

IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL



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NO PROBLEMO

Williams Bally Midway, the company behind such classics as Defender and Robotron 2084, has brought the blockbusting Terminator 2 movie to the arcades. Rik Haynes flew to Chicago for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the T2 coin-op...

Despite Batman and Robocop dominating home computer games charts in recent years, the concept of releasing a game-of-the-movie hasn't really been a tremendous success in the arcade market. High-profile titles such as The Empire Strikes Back, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and Aliens were only moderately enjoyable in their coin-op form. Though in the case of Tron, the game was probably more popular than the film!

Terminator 2, the smash hit of the summer, is easily the most marketable movie property around at the moment, so it was perhaps inevitable that somebody would pick-up the electronic amusement rights. The surprise came when the contract didn't go to the likes of Atari Games, Konami or Data East. Situated in the leafy outer suburbs of Chicago, Williams Bally Midway has released relatively few video games over the past decade. However, a constant display of quality and innovation has made the relatively small company stand out from the crowd.

If you were to compile a top ten of your all-time favourite arcade hits, it's a fair bet this list would include at least one title from this arcade veteran such as Defender, Stargate, Robotron 2084, Joust, Sinistar, Blaster, Star Rider, Narc, Smash TV or Tron.

With such an impressive track-record, what better firm to adapt the movie that contains some of the most lavish special effects ever seen on the big screen? Not that the original motion picture has a monopoly on the state-of-the-art. Actual film footage, authentic location backdrops, digitised images of the star-studded cast and even sampled speech from the one and only Arnold Schwarzenegger have all been incorporated into a thrilling non-stop high energy game.

"This is going to be the biggest hit of the year," confidently predicts the firm's Marketing Manager Roger Sharpe, "We feel very fortunate to have been there at the right time with the right kind of games. Arnold and James Cameron, the director of both

Stan Winston, king of movie special effects, poses with one of his favourite and most notable creations... the Endoskeleton actually used in Terminator 2.

Hunter Killers and massive war machines rolling over a ravaged terrain populated by a handful of survivors. You're helping the last remaining humans on earth in their battle against extinction. The evil machine empire has spent the last thirty years trying to rid the planet of its male and female inhabitants. These machines are controlled by a super-computer called Skynet. It's your mission, along with the rest of the guerrilla troops, to make your way to Skynet's location and destroy it. Taking orders from rebel leader John Connor, you must remember to protect your fellow soldiers and all other humans.

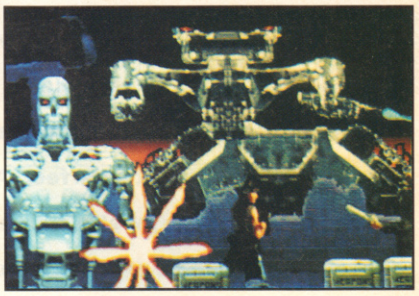
If you're successful in your attempt to save future world, you must use Skynet's Time Field Generator to travel back to the present day. Before Skynet was captured, the crafty computer sent its newest weapon, the T1000, back in time to destroy the young John Connor before he could become a threat. Your new mission is to find John and protect him at all costs. This means destroying the T1000 any way you can. A tricky problem this, considering this hyper-advanced machine is made from liquid metal and can quickly change its shape to foil any sort of attack. If you've seen the movie, you know what to expect.

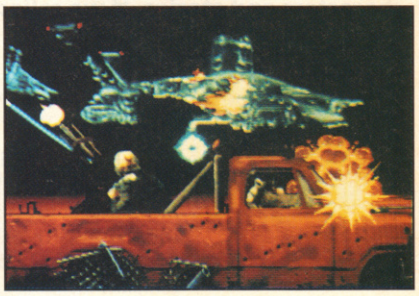
HASTA LA VISTA, BABY

Over a year in production, the Terminator 2 coin-op has cost an estimated three million dollars to develop. With such a huge investment, it was lucky Williams Bally Midway had the full backing and support of James Cameron, who is apparently a bit of a video game fan.

"We showed Cameron what was done on Narc so he immediately knew this wasn't going to be a Nintendo-style of game using a more conventional approach," comments co-designer George Petro, "The really great thing about Cameron is that he respects the art-form of video games. This guy doesn't treat it as some sort of measly dime-store stuff. He just wanted to input his ideas and let us go with them. At the end of the initial brainstorming session, Jim got up and said 'give these guys everything they need'. The access was really total from then on."

The Terminator 2: Judgment Day arcade video game creative team [from left to right]: Jack Haeger (co-designer and project leader), Jon Vogel (graphic designer), George Petro (co-designer and project leader), Warren Davis (programmer), Bill Dabelstein (programmer), kneeling Tim Coman (graphic designer) and not pictured Chris Granner (sounds, music and speech).





Originally, Haeger and Petro flew to California and read the T2 script to decide whether they could make a game out of it. Their answer was a resounding, Yeehaw!

"The concept of Terminator 2 was custom-made for a video game," recounts Haeger, "The action sequences in the film and the T1000 character real-

Terminator movies, are very pleased with what we have accomplished. They've given their approval throughout the whole cycle."

IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL

Taking the role of Arnie, a cyborg killing machine from the future, players are thrown into a roller-coaster ride through all the action scenes of the film. The creative group at Williams Bally Midway thought an arcade video game with a couple of guns strapped to the cabinet would be the best way to rework Terminator 2 into a showcase of interactive entertainment.

"In our game you get to be a Terminator," reveals co-designer Jack Haeger, "You're actually Arnold Schwarzenegger. You've got an Endo Battle Rifle with a kick ass recoil in your hand and you can shoot anything and anybody you want."

The concept of this seven stage video game was obviously governed by the script of the movie. However, license has been taken in certain areas to produce a more playable game. T2 is therefore equally split between present day and a future world conflict. This section plays a far more important role in the video game because it offered excellent game design opportunities. The bleak landscape of the future world after nuclear Armageddon is filled with legions of ominous metal Endoskeletons, flying

"We've got to make players part with their money every time they play the game, we don't have the luxury of a one-hit retail sale. We focus on doing the best possible products we can for arcade coin-ops rather than worrying about what comprises we'll have to do down the road for home adaptation. That's significant. None of the other companies out there can make the same statement. It's much easier for companies like Sega to cut corners and come out with a game they know can be released in the home in six months time."

Roger Sharpe, Marketing Manager, Williams Bally Midway

ly lend themselves to the format. We explore the future part of the movie in greater depth because it makes for really good battles. Although they never actually made it to the movie, these future world sequences were taken from the script. So they're the original ideas of the creators of Terminator 2 but they just never got a chance to show them."

Petro adds: "We ended up doing a gun game where two players simultaneously participate in a sci-fi shooting gallery. With Terminator 2 we thought this was a pretty safe way to go. Nevertheless, this is the most interactive gun game ever. Human characters and even Arnie himself might say 'Way to Go' or 'Great Shot' or reprimand you if you're doing something wrong."

"Terminator 2 was almost a video game to start with. It deals with the same themes of universal destruction and amazing amounts of carnage. It's perfect. At the same time, we keep in mind that we're a creative force in our own right capable of producing our own worlds, characters and stories. If we relied solely on inspiration from Hollywood then we'd be dead."

Jack Haeger, co-designer of the T2 coin-op

Dave Hudson and Ed Marsh, creators of the Making of Terminator 2 trailer, filmed the video documentation for the graphic designers Tim Coman and Jon Vogel. These included the specific shots of characters and props needed to transform them into computer images.

Eventually, Haeger personally went out to the set for a whole week overseeing the final procurement of the various bits and pieces needed for use in the game. Actor Robert Patrick, the newcomer who skillfully played the T1000 killing machine, spent a long gruelling day walking on a treadmill while wearing all the heavy prosthetics that were used to help Industrial Light and Magic create the stunning computer-generated special effects in the movie.

"The major thing about our video games are they're not done till their fun," indicates Petro, "It's got to be a cool game before it's carted out of here. It's really a lot of hard work. At Williams we've taken a different direction. We're the pioneers of live action digitised graphics. There maybe other guys around that are claiming they did it, but that's not true. This exciting new technology is the main thing that keeps players coming back for more. We're getting it closer to real life, it's just like playing the movie now. If you actually get off watching action movies what could be better than actually doing it and not getting hurt? We've come a long way since the days of Space Invaders."

JUDGMENT DAYS

Here is a brief rundown of the images, film, video tape, models and speech needed during the production of each scene in the T2 coin-op...

September 17, 1990
- **Physical model and detailed drawings of the plasma-pulse battle rifle used in the future world.**
- **Stop action models, from the original Terminator movie, of the Battle Chassis, Flying Hunter Killer and Ground Roving HK.**

October 1
- **Specifications of movie opening scene.**
- **Details of the human soldiers outfit from the future.**
- **On-location video tape of future world battlefield.**

October 29
- **Model of four-legged Centurion.**
- **Any existing concept drawings of Skynet fortress.**

December 3
- **Use of future world John Connor character for voice and close-ups.**

January 7, 1991
- **Use of young John Connor for gameplay action.**
- **Use of Sarah Connor character for gameplay action.**
- **On-location video tape of Galleria video arcade.**

February 4
- **On-location video tape of mental institution.**
- **On-location video tape of Cyberdyne Systems.**

March 4
- **Use of humanoid T1000 character for gameplay action.**
- **Concept or real footage of T1000 metamorphosis.**
- **On-location video tape of police blockade at Cyberdyne Systems.**

April 1
- **On-location video tape of steel mill.**
- **Use of Arnie, John and Sarah characters for close-ups and speech.**

If you can't hack the dazzling imagery and blistering gameplay of the coin-op, Williams Bally Midway has made a pinball machine.

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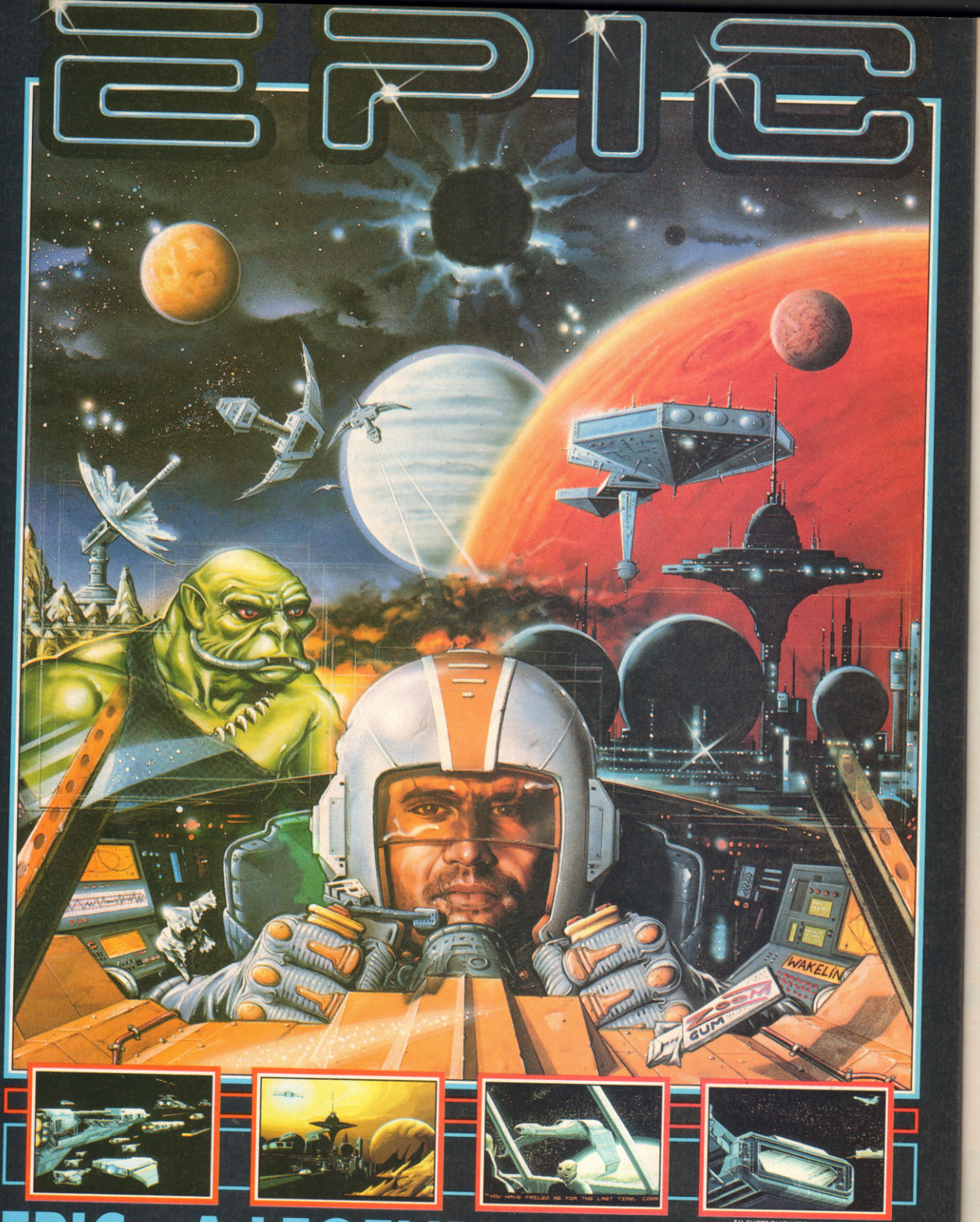

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Letters

SORT YOURSELVES OUT!

Okay, ACE! I don't get it! With great confusion I read Issue 50 of your (excellent) magazine. Especially the letters drew my attention! There was a letter called "Blazing a Trail to Nowhere" about the constant rewarding of ACE Trailblazers lately. ACE explains this by telling that the software scene is so healthy lately. But when I look at the first page I read "Lets's face it, you've had to put up with some nonsense, haven't you? Low quality games and even lower quality mags."

What's going on? Are we getting good or bad games lately? I buy this magazine to know whether a game is worth buying or just plain garbage and what do I get? Contradictory statements!! Could you please tell me how all this REALLY is?

For the rest, I was quite disappointed with your renewed formula of ACE Magazine. It's not that the reviews are bad, far from it, but it's the statistics! Just now I got used to the old PIC and the other stuff, you get an idea and give the whole thing a different look! Now I have to look five times before I know how you think about a game.

Apart from these things, you still make the best magazine for home computers.

Leon van Steensel
Amersfoort
Holland

Tut tut tut, you really mustn't take things so literally. It's true, over the last few months the games-buying public has had to put up with an awful amount of crap. If we give away, say on average, three or four Trailblazers a month, there are still countless products released the same month that fall way beyond the quality threshold. And that's the precisely the sort of "nonsense" we're talking about. It's true, there have been some right corking games recently, but that doesn't excuse all the crap that gets released. As a rough estimate, we'd say that 65% of all software released is of an unacceptable quality - we're here to steer you away from the sub-standard majority and towards the good stuff. Simple as that. And as for the new-look PIC curve - we've had a few people write in to express the disgruntlement, so we've given it another little facelift this month to make it even easier to understand. Alright?

I AM VERY CLEVER

Dear Sirs, I'm an educated person - a professional (qualified) psychotherapist and member of MENSA whose main interest is playing computer games. I've a vast collection which I fussily add to regularly. Usually brain games - PowerMonger, Welltris, etc. These games require patience, skill, determination and confidence - as well as, in some cases, history, geography, politics and statistics. So why is it that computer games are looked down on as being easy and childish by those who choose to do other pastimes?

Ms Carmen Brulez
Ilford
Essex

Way to go, Doc! Here at ACE we wholeheartedly agree with your educated and intelligent opinions. There's nothing more annoying than seeing our beloved medium denounced by some pencil-necked TV presenter with a superiority complex. Unfortunately, the situation looks bleak and unlikely to change in the near future - unless of course Channel 4 gets its finger out and does something half-decent with its forthcoming Gamesmaster show. Here's hoping...

RAW DEAL?

Dear Editor, Although I never get round to sending off letters to magazines, I have decided to make an exception after the re-vamp of your issues.

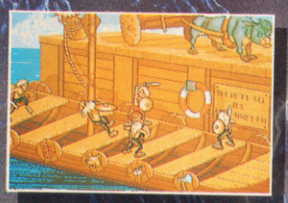
In layout terms, very well done. It's much cleaner, more comfortable and therefore portrays a more visually interesting and grown-up image. The thing I'm afraid of though is that this may be at the expense of the content of your magazine. Firstly I'm sad to see that console games have been put back into their own section. C+VG have got rid of this and you have done the same over recent issues. Classing console owners as a different race of users altogether is, in a way, degrading. It may be just the issue in question (No 50) but I hope that major console releases get the same six page treatment as computer releases. In order to give the Megadrive (as an example) such praise, and then to give is such poor coverage is hypocrisy. I am a Megadrive owner (surprise, surprise!!), but I'm sure if owners of other machines got this treatment, they would complain twice as much.

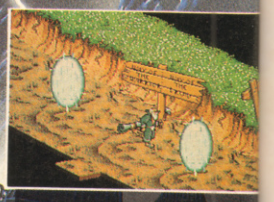
In other areas we seem to have lost Tech news, special articles such as "Too Hot To Handle", "Planet of the Gamers" and other important articles, international reports and new developments.

Other favourites that have gone are Shop Watch, crossword and the format columns, which always provided a light-hearted alter-

HEIMDALL

Norse legend tells of a time when the Gods of Valhalla and Asgard created a race known as the Vikings. Born to represent his people at the battle of Ragnorak, Heimdall must first fight, solve puzzles and explore the Viking world to find the weapons of the Gods.





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native to the rest of the magazine. Glad to see you have kept the Blitter though...

To criticise at such an early time may seem premature, but I hope the ideas are thought over as soon as possible.

Carl Davis
Ashfield
Nottinghamshire

Don't fret! We're not trying to give console owners a raw deal. The only reason that a Megadrive game hasn't yet received a six-page review is that we've not yet seen a product to which the ACE mega-treatment would be applicable. Rest assured, there will be Megadrive six-pagers in ACE in the future. In the meantime, we think that console owners get a pretty fair deal within their own section - look at last month's two-page Streets of Rage review. To call it degrading is pushing things a bit far, we think. As for your concern about ACE features and special reports, you need not worry. We'll carry on doing them, starting with this month's Interactive Movie expose. And there are plenty more to come. So keep 'em peeled.

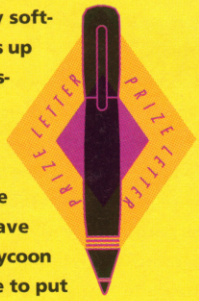
2 EASY 4 U?

Dear ACE, I felt I had to write to you to compliment you on your "new look" magazine. I love the six-page reviews as they are very detailed! But to get to the point of the letter, I would like to know why nearly all Megadrive games are so easy! I recently purchased Sonic the Hedgehog and within just under a week I managed to complete it. Also, are there any plans for Sonic 2, as I loved the aforementioned. Finally, when is G-LOC coming out on the Megadrive as I heard about it long ago, but I haven't heard anything since then! Once again, well done on an Ace (sorry) magazine.

Oliver Ramsay
East Lothian
Scotland

Well, we're not too sure about Megadrive games being too easy. Maybe you're just some hot games demon and even the toughest arcade challenge can be completed with just the flick of your wrist. You're right about Sonic the Hedgehog - it is too easy. From the letters we've received, most people seem to have completed it in around one or two weeks. As for Sonic 2, the success of the first game means that a sequel is an almost cast-iron certainty (just look at the Mario series - five games so far), although there's no information as yet. We've drawn a similar blank with G-LOC. No doubt it'll appear eventually, but when it will be and what it will be like remains a mystery to us.

STUPID BOXES!



Dear ACE, why is it that so many games come in outsize boxes? It makes it very difficult for me to fit them on my software shelf. Back in 1984 my Grandad put some shelves up for me, and the games I had at the time (The Hobbit, Trans-Am and Zooom!) fitted perfectly well at the time. Everything, as they say, was lovely jubbly.

Now, however, everything has changed. Companies are putting their games out in giant boxes that are much, much bigger than they need to be. I now have games like midwinter, Leisure Suit Larry and Railroad Tycoon which are far too big to fit onto my shelves. So I have to put them on the floor, on top of the record player, under the bed - wherever they will fit. And as you can imagine, it looks a right old two and eight!

Why oh why do software publishers insist on this foolhardy policy of releasing their games in cumbersome, impractical boxes. And when are we going to have a standard for computer game packaging, like they have for CDs and sell-through videos? It's not as if it's much to ask, is it?

Clive Endenshaw
Peckham
London

There are two schools of thought on this highly controversial issue. One theory goes that the whole idea behind putting games in big boxes is just to make the product look more elaborate and desirable, even though the game itself may not live up to the promises of the flashy packaging. It's all about perceived value, you see. The other argument is that, with big, elaborate games like Silent Service II, Willy Beamish and all the rest, the large packaging is necessary, not just to reflect the quality of the game, but also to contain all the documentation and paraphenalia. Games like the Microprose simulations have big, hefty manuals, maps, keyboard overlays and all sorts of other bits. It seems a bit dodgy to try and cram all that into a little box just because of shelf-stacking considerations. Computer games are not like videos or CDs where no special documentation is required. The industry is obviously undecided on this particular topic, as game boxes come in so many different shapes and sizes, from cheap little crystal cases to giant glossy extravaganzas. You're right, though, it is a bit of a pain in the behind trying to fit them all on the shelves. So come on, industry fat cats, get your act together!

FROM THE PEN OF A SHINING WIT

Dear ACE, what a load of bollards! As you've probably guessed I'm referring to your magazine's new format. I faithfully ran round to my local shop to purchase your usually excellent magazine. I parted with my £1.80 and ran back to my house. Once home I read the mag and then banished it to under my bed. Please go back to the good old ways.

Douglas Hepburn
Denniston Glasgow

You what? Here at ACE we don't mind a bit of criticism - in fact we positively welcome it - but if that's all you can manage, why bother to write in at all? We can't make any changes if you don't tell us what the problem is! Let's have some more constructive criticism next time, huh?

MORE REVIEWS!

Dear ACE, I own an Amiga 500 and I have been buying ACE since issue 7. I have always thought that ACE reviews are much better than your rivals.

The new-look ACE reviews are just as good but because each review covers six pages only six computer games get the full ACE treatment, and the other games only get a few paragraphs in the New Releases section. I could understand you only giving a quick review to a game which is basically crap, but surely games like Cruise for a Corpse and Final Fight deserve full review?

Trevor Booth
Etchingham
East Sussex

Whether or not a game gets a six-page review depends not just on its quality, but on how applicable it is to such elaborate treatment. Sure Final Fight is a nice game, but it's a bit simple and therefore dragging it out over six pages would have been a bit excruciating. As it was we were able to tell you just how good it was within the New Releases section. And although at the moment, only six games get an ACE six-page reviews each month, but we intend to be expanding that number in the future. Look out for eight and even TEN games getting the ACE Super Reviews at a time in the not-too-distant future. Yowza!

MEGADRIVE ON THE MOVE?

Dear ACE, recently I was having a chat about games with a couple of my mates, and someone said they'd heard a rumour that Sega was going to make a handheld Megadrive. You know, like the GameGear, only 16-bit bit and with the same specs, so the software would be as good. They also reckon that there's going to be an adaptor so that you'd be able to play actual Megadrive cartridges on it!

I said they were talking crap because if there was anything like that coming out, I would have read about it in ACE. I have had a five pound bet with my friend, so please ACE, could you set the record straight for us?

I love the new-look magazine, especially the six-page reviews - much better than what some of the other mags try to fob us off with. Sometimes you get the feeling that they haven't even bothered to play the game properly, but with an ACE review you can tell that it's really been played to death, and you can have much more faith in the final mark because of it. From now on I'll be basing all my purchases on the ACE review. Keep up the good work!

David Knight
Bromley
Kent

Get ready to collect your cash, Dave! There's no such thing as a handheld Megadrive, and any rumours about one on the way are entirely unfounded. Sounds to us like your mate has either made it up to try and impress you, or he's just unfortunate enough to read a less informative magazine. Perhaps he should switch to ACE. Show him a copy and no doubt he'll be converted. And don't spend that five pounds all at once.

OOPS!

No doubt you noticed that, like Frank Spencer, we "had a bit of trouble" and "did a whoopsy" with our Alien 3 feature last month. Kevin Lockwood from Kingswood in Bristol Gareth Perch from Kidderminster and Worcestershire and Sam Joyce from Chorleywood in Herts were just three of the observant readers who were kind enough to write in and bring it to our attention. Cheers, lads!

We'd like to take this opportunity to apologise to all our readers who never got to find out what "these little varmints" actually did. The funny thing was, it wasn't actually our fault, you see? What with all the excellent things that went in to the ACE relaunch, we had a few technical hitches, and one of them was that the big complicated system that outputs our pages got it wrong, and that was that. Anyway, you're not interested in listening to our problems. You want to read the rest of the Alien 3 feature. So by way of compensation, we're reprinting the missing text right here and now.

These little varmints scuttle along the floor and leap up onto the player's face, endeavouring to impregnate them with it's evil alien seed. The player will have to adopt similar movements to those used in the Turtles coin-op to wiggle around and shake the face hugger loose, says Mirrorsoft.

Graphically, the film has been surprisingly easy to convert. Because all of the humans in the game have shaved heads and all look the same, it's been possible to save lots of space and use similar graphics! Much of the game takes place in huge underground chambers, and so it's going to be a pretty dark and gloomy affair (just take a look at some of the shots from the movie here and you'll see what we mean).

Slated for a release early next year, Alien 3 promises to deliver all the thrills and spills which the previous licensed titles of the series have failed to do.

The Other Two

No video collection would be complete without these two storming SF movies, available in your local video store for around a tenner.

Alien (1979, Ridley Scott)
The original space-horror movie. Following only two years after the high-gloss gung-ho Star Wars, Alien presented a very different vision of space. Set aboard the Nostromo, an enormous and largely vacant refinery ship, it tells the grizzly tale of how a lone insectoid invader decimates its entire crew of seven, leaving only Ripley, a flight officer played with convincing strength by Sigourney Weaver, to fend for herself. Although some of the spaceship design with its big white slabs and flickering LED's looks a bit dated, the H. R. Geiger Alien design is simply excellent and the atmosphere of impossible, looming tension is fantastic.

What on earth happened to Scott immediately afterwards with nonsense like Legend and Someone To Watch Over Me is anyone's guess.

Aliens (1986, James Cameron)
A big disappointment to many hard-core fans of the original, Aliens was churlishly termed Rambo in Space by many critics. While 'Master of Effects' Cameron did away with all but the most off-the-shelf suspense techniques, his own twist on the theme brought a new generation of fans to the series.

Ripley is persuaded, after being found drifting in space for 57 years, to journey back to LV426 - the colony where the Nostromo's crew unwittingly picked up the alien in the first movie - and destroy a troop of Aliens that have taken over. Her role of adviser swiftly changes as the space marines sent with her find themselves no match for the silent deadly warriors.

With far more firefights than the first movie, Aliens delivers more thrills-per second, and it's perhaps a more appealing all-round picture, except for being bogged down with rather clumsy maternal metaphors.

COME ON DOWN!

You've heard what your fellow gamers have to say - now, why not take the chance to add your penny's worth? For the price of a stamp, you could have your views digested by tens of thousands of ACE readers! And if you've really got something interesting to say, there's a chance of a wowzer software prize, which we generously give away to the sender of the Star Letter each month. So what are you waiting for? Get that pent-up aggression off your chest and send it to us at ACE Letters, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU.

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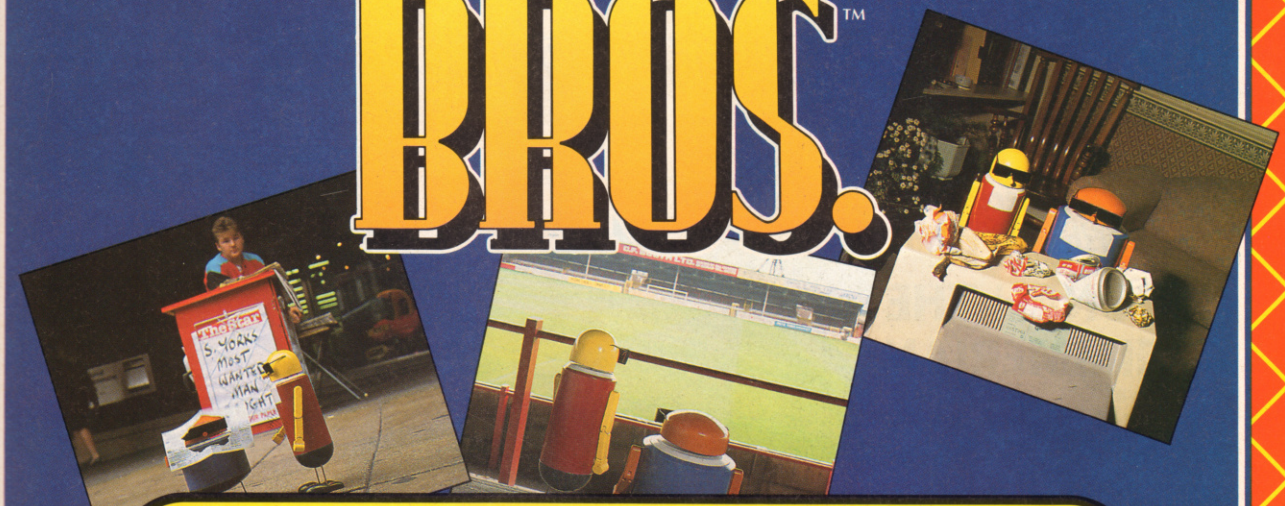

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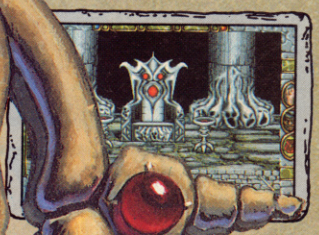

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STILL NOT SHOWING...

It's been over four years since we first heard of the interactive movie - so why are we still waiting to play the film? Is it time to call "cut" on the much-maligned genre? Maybe not...

"The world's first interactive movie! It's like playing a film!" Yeah, right. We've all heard the claims, and all been disappointed - but not altogether surprised - when the finished game almost invariably fails to live up to the hype. Since the inception of the genre with Cinemaware's Defender of the Crown in 1986, "playing the film" has remained one of the hot industry buzzwords, with software companies (mostly American-based) going all out to support the idea - but with little to actually substantiate it in the way of finished product.

But to be fair to the late, great Cinemaware, it's not their fault - in fact after the first few, unsuccessful experiments (Defender, SDI and Sinbad to name but three), the team went on to produce some of the most cinematic "interactive movies" ever seen - Rocket Ranger, Wings and It Came From The Desert all hit their targets magnificently, building genuinely playable games around true cinema-style presentation and atmosphere. The problem was that many of the companies that have tried to follow Cinemaware's lead didn't quite get hold of the right end of the stick, and most of the "playable films" that have so far emerged as a result have been uninspiring to say the least.

Of course it's arguable that the whole idea of interactive movies, at least in their truest sense, is a load of old bollocks. Okay okay, no-one's going to argue with the fact that it sounds great. The chance to really be Luke Skywalker and really fly an X-Wing down the Death Star trench and really cross swords with Vader is undeniably a pretty sexy concept. But of course it's not going to happen without some kind of radical technological development, and even with that side of things seen to, the whole concept still seems flawed. No matter how "virtual" the experience is, the whole idea of the movie's lead character (ie you) being able to make spontaneous and free-willed decisions that affect the course of the plot completely goes against the principles that allow real movies to work in the first place.

A smart screenwriter uses character and action to structure his story in an exciting way, with different

plot elements combining to create new situations which push the story forward. The hero's decisions are carefully planned and made not just to reveal his character, but also to help the plot develop in an exciting manner. How could an interactive movie develop the story to react in a "real" way to the hero's decisions when they're being made spontaneously by the player? Even if the program was smart enough to allow the artificial characters to respond realistically, half the time the actual result would be as dull as dishwater.

The only way to ensure a properly structured story which builds up to a suitably worthy climax is to force it onto the player by causing the plot to develop in a certain way with only minor changes, regardless of what player decisions are made - and that, of course, compromises the interactivity. This is the approach take by most of today's cinema software, such as Wing Commander II and the likes of David Wolf: Secret Agent - and all it does is prove that the two concepts "interactive" and "movie" are as alike as chalk and cheese. As oh-so excellent as it may sound as a pipe dream, in practical terms it's a self-defeating exercise. And though much was being made of CD-I, CD-ROM, CDTV and CD-what-have-you's "play the film" potential about a year ago, we've still seen nothing of note, even though these storage devices are readily available now. CRL's Psycho Killer on the CDTV amounted to little more than an elaborate animated slideshow with a decision to make every now and again. Though the hype-mongers did their best at the time, the reality of CD-I's shortcomings have proved that there's little potential beyond making conventional games simply bigger in size. And that's like saying a three-hour film's better than a two-hour film. Never mind the quality, feel the width!

But oh dear, it's starting to sound very gloomy and depressing, isn't it? Don't fret! Sure, the whole idea of really interacting with characters and there being a real story and all that malarkey may be a pretty far-fetched notion, but that's not to say that the towel should be thrown in altogether.

It's arguable that the whole idea of interactive movies, at least in their truest sense, is a load of old bollocks.

Cinemaware has proven that the idea, at least in its most basic form, can work. Rather than trying to simulate the more complex and deeper elements of movie making - character, story structure and so on - games like It Came From The Desert and Rocket Ranger succeed by building the framework of a simple, playable game and drenching it with cinema-style visuals, music and atmosphere. Though the result isn't really the interactive movie it claims to be, the experience is acutely cinematic. Many of the techniques that are used to create atmosphere and tension in movies can and do work equally well in games. It Came From The Desert's soundtrack, for example, is so perfectly scored to sound like a B movie's incidental music that, as far as your ears are concerned at least, you might as well be at the pictures. A game doesn't need to play like a film to be cinematic - it just has to feel like one.

APOCALYPSE NOW!

Strangeways Software's forthcoming shoot'em-up Apocalypse may not boast the most cinematic gameplay in the world, but thanks to the talents of graphic artist Paul "Dokk" Docherty, what it does have in an intro sequence that's storyboarded in almost exactly the same way as a legitimate movie scene, using many of the same tricks and techniques to create the pre-game ambience. Dokk himself was nice enough to take us through it...

FRAME 1:
The screen starts out in total darkness and the first thing we see is a hand switching on a single lightbulb.

FRAME 2:
In the next cut we pull out to see a hostage, bound in a chair and guarded by two hefty soldiers. Initially the body is slumped over, but the soldier behind pulls him up by the air. Notice the use of very little light, radiating from directly behind the main image.

FRAME 3:
There's a blinding flash and we cut to the P.O.V of the soldier holding the hostage's head. A fourth, mystery figure takes a photograph of the scene. Again, there is little light and his face is obscured.

FRAME 4:
We cut back to the last shot, and the soldier on the right breaks the hostage's leg. There's a crunch as the bone snaps.

FRAME 5:
The "camera" zooms in close as the hostage screams in pain. From this distance we can see that he's bleeding from the mouth and has a black eye - a sign that he's been subject to previous torture.

FRAME 6:
Another close cut, this time to the face of the mystery photographer, who has leaned in close to get a good look at his victim. At first he smiles, and then the expression turns to a serious scowl, directed at the soldier above him.

FRAME 7:
The soldier produces an automatic pistol and cocks the hammer - notice we've zoomed in much closer now. The actual intercutting of shots is becoming faster too.

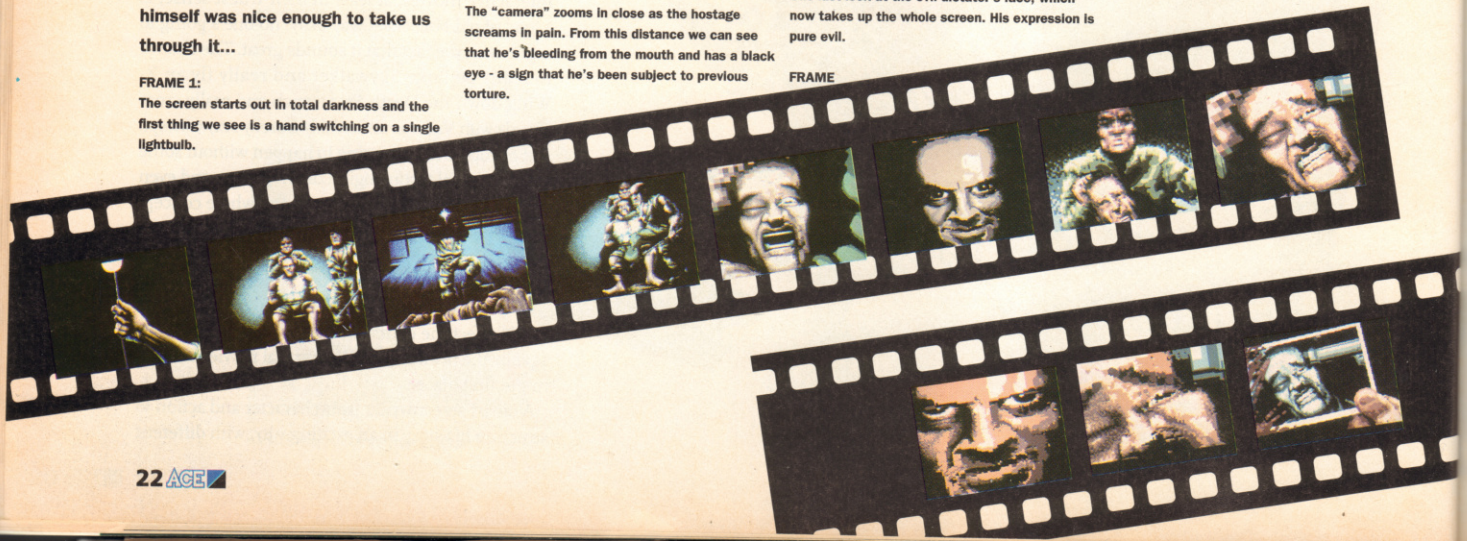
FRAME 8:
The camera goes in further still as the barrel is pressed to the terrified hostage's head. By this point grim music is playing, adding to the tension.

FRAME 9:
One last look at the evil dictator's face, which now takes up the whole screen. His expression is pure evil.

FRAME 10:
The camera goes into extreme close-up as the barrel is pushed tighter to the weeping hostage's forehead. And then...

FRAME 11:
There's the sound of an echoing gunshot, a flash, and we see a bloodspattered photographic representation of the last frame, presumably taken just before the hostage was shot and sent out as a message. Now they've gone too damn far...

NOTE: All graphics are working screens in development, so pay no attention to the messy or chunky bits.



(Left) Dynamix's David Wolf: Secret Agent was the American company's first foray into interactive movies, and though it aroused a lot of novelty-value interest at the time, it never really captured people's imagination, simply because the arcade gameplay was so superficial. Since then the company has improved a lot, with cinematic products like Rise of the Dragon, Heart of China (inset) and this month's Willy Beamish, where the adventure-based format allows for much stronger gameplay and more flexible storylines.

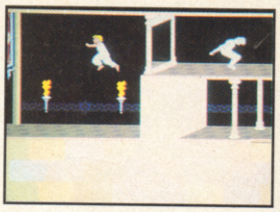
(Below) Cinemaware's CD-ROM version of It Came From The Desert was a costly experiment, using professional production facilities, live locations and actors - albeit not very good ones. As interesting as it may sound, this more elaborate incarnation was actually less effective than the original, as the camp antics of the actors served only to detract from the atmosphere.

That's a point that seems to be filtering through to a lot of games designers, who are starting to use more and more cinematic techniques to endow their games with extra style and atmosphere. American designer Jordan Mechner virtually pioneered the idea back in 1986 with the 8-bit beat'em-up Karateka - game-wise it was little more than a progressive combat game, but it managed to sell itself as an interactive movie due to its cinematic paraphernalia

and presentation. Mechner, also a cinema screenwriter, took the idea further last year with Prince of Persia, which again provided movie-like atmosphere through music and inter-level set pieces. By giving his characters remarkably lifelike animation and designing the game's levels so that the hero's escapades were frequently of a nailbiting nature - hanging by the fingertips from crumbling ledges, rolling under portcullises just as their razor-sharp spikes crash to the ground, swordfighting with ghostly opponents - even the odd enigma, such as the bizarre mirror-image of the player, who appears on certain screens., he added far more atmosphere to his game than most mass-storage efforts have had to date.

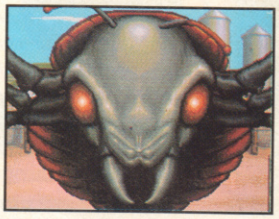
It's hardly surprising to learn that Mechner is a great fan of Errol Flynn and the whole swashbuckling genre, so cinematic in style is the presentation of his games' action elements. Given the simplistic, arcadey nature of the game itself, it's not really comparable to more conventional "cinemaware",

GAMES THAT WORKED



PRINCE OF PERSIA

Jordan Mechner's second arcade adventure surprisingly had less of an overtly cinematic feel than his first Karateka, keeping the intros and inter-level scenes short and sweet. Instead, the movie-like thrills are provided within the game - a real achievement - by desiging the game around the central character, thereby ensuring that peril lurks around every corner and every peril is straight out of the old Saturday morning cliffhanger serials. Superb.

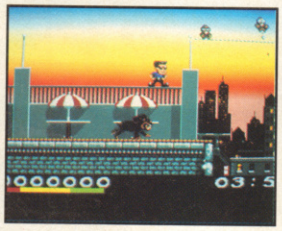


IT CAME FROM THE DESERT

Probably the best example of an interactive movie in its truest form, It Came From The Desert was the perfect pastiche of the monster B-movie genre. The adventure-like format that is used to thread together the many arcade sub-games allows for a convoluted, involving storyline, smart characters (interaction is minimal but much can be learned from them, and they all have identifiable personalities) and a pleasing non-linear feel. But what really makes it happen are the awesome aesthetics. The period atmosphere has been poured on so thickly that the atmosphere and tension really, really do grip in a cinematic sense. It's even frightening in places. Unfortunately, Cinemaware's experiments with a CD-ROM version, featuring live actors and locations, didn't come to much, actually boasting less atmosphere than the original. It just goes to show.

ALIENS

An oldie but a goodie. Aliens was only ever released on 8-bit, but the claustrophobic atmosphere and fine maze-orientated gameplay make it second to none in the film licence stakes. It was a simple enough concept, based on the general idea of the Colonial Marines exploring the alien caverns on LV426. The player was put in charge of six of the film's major characters, and must get at least one of them to the Mother Alien's hatchery at the other end of the infested complex to put an end to the deadly species. Played entirely in first-perspective, the game had genuine shock value - the aliens attack without warning, and since the field of vision is so slim, knowing there's a creature in the same room, but not being able to see it is a distressing experience. Running out of ammo is even worse. Watching a character's vital signs suddenly go dead is even worse... Play it and get very scared indeed.



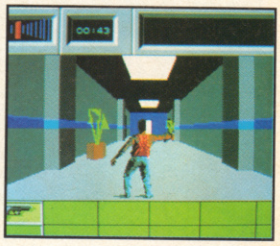
HUDSON HAWK

Special FX's recent interpretation of the smelly Bruce Willis film scored points not just for being an exceptionally playable platform game, but also for cleverly working themed elements from the film into the product without compromising the rest of the game. Admittedly, it's not really very cinematic at all, but by coming up with what is undeniably the best mix of film material and maneagable gameplay, it deserves a place in this little hall of fame all the same.

GAMES THAT DIDN'T

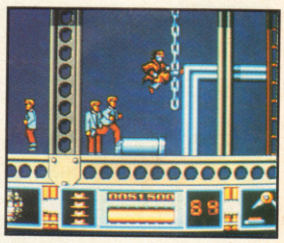
WING COMMANDER

Hailed on the box as "the most complete interactive movie ever", Origin's WC was more like "watching the game" than "playing the film". The concept was fine, it just didn't work in practice. It's 50% film, 50%, with the game parts being basically just a simplistic flight simulation, and the film parts, though pretty the first time, lack any form of interaction and therefore get very boring very quickly. The perfect example of an interactive movie gone wrong.



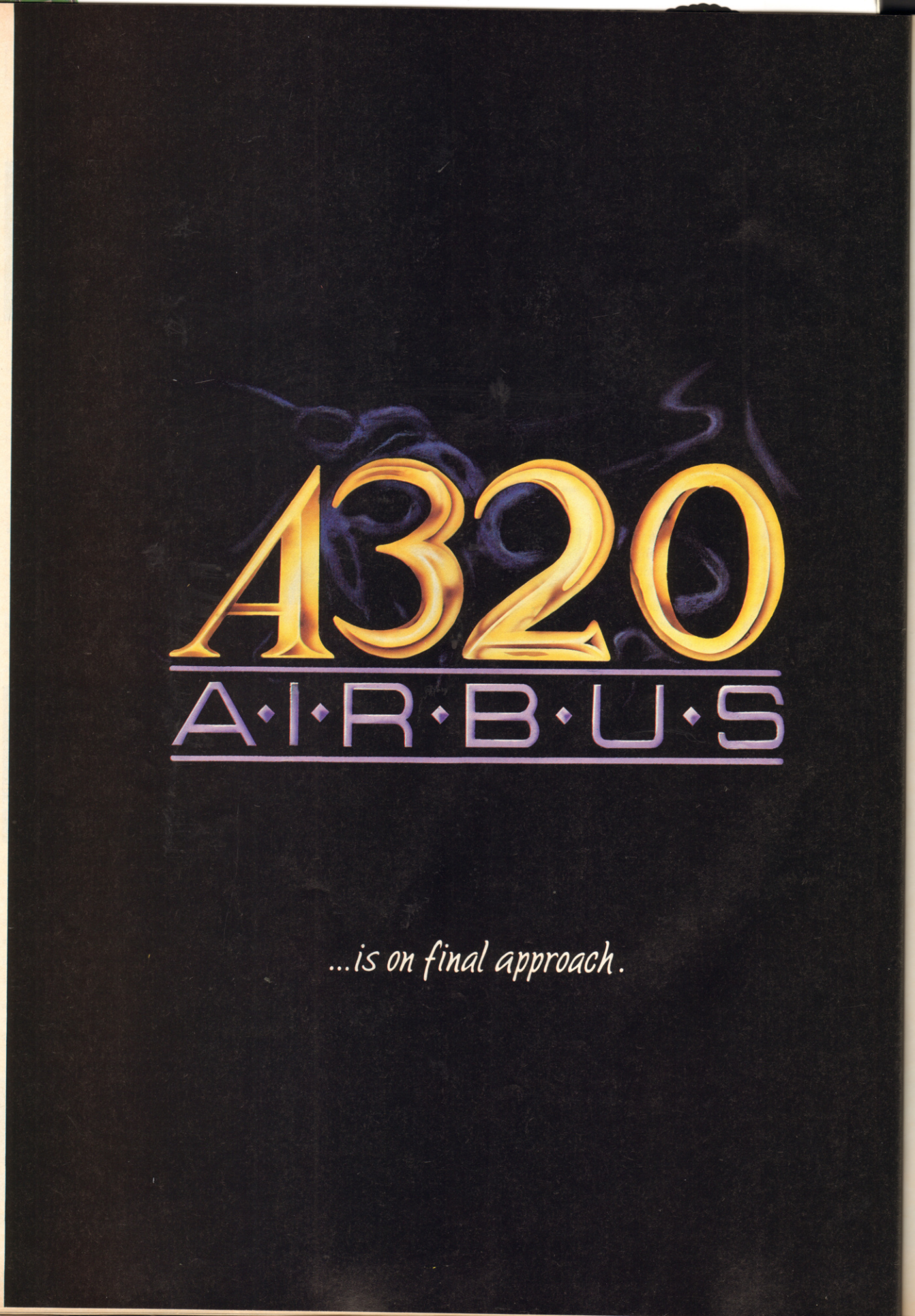
DIE HARD

How this silly mess ever came about is anyone's guess, but thankfully it was only PC owners who had to suffer. Along with The Terminator, Die Hard probably has more potential for computer game adaptation than any other movie ever. Unfortunately, instead of the huge explosions, excellent firefights and claustrophobic tunnel-crawling of the movie, what we got was a game that completely missed the point. It's so slow and confusing that nothing happens 90% of the time, and when it does it's difficult to make it out. The player's character is only ever seen from the back (probably due to some aggravation over the use of Bruce Willis' face - it's suspiciously absent from the box), and the vector-driven environment is slow and unconvincing. A tragedy.



DARKMAN (AND ALL THE REST OF THEM)

Despite a few exceptions like Batman and The Untouchables, the whole "five games in one" philosophy has proved to be one of the most critically unsuccessful ways of doing a film licence. And still no-one's learned their lesson. Even the aforementioned exceptions weren't particularly reminiscent of the films, scoring all their points on gameplay alone. The idea itself is fine, allowing designers to concentrate on specific action scenes (the helicopter chase in T2, for example) for the basis of the games. The only problem is that there's not really anything to link the sub-games into one coherent product, and as such the overall game feels disjointed and often just plain stupid - it looks more like the trailer than the film itself. How would you feel if you went to see a film where the action scenes just followed on one after the other, with no lead-up or explanation at all? Exactly.


A320
A·I·R·B·U·S
...is on final approach.

Al Pacino as Big Boy Caprice in Warren Beaty's Dick Tracy movie. Though the film itself was positively drenched in artistic imagery (the sets and costumes were designed using only seven basic colours, so as to emulate the feel of a comic strip), the software licence was unbelievably bland and born, failing to pick up on any of the elements which made the film so nice to look at. Another perfect example of a great opportunity wasted...

although some of the more cliffhanging moments can produce "ooh"s and "aah"s that are very definitely reminiscent of Saturday night up the Odeon.

The idea behind Delphine's range of Cinematique adventure games was always to emulate movie presentation to create a more involved, atmospheric experience. Despite some impressive music, early attempts like Future Wars and Operation Stealth were just very classy, playable adventures with little in the way of cinematic qualities. But like Cinemaware, these early experiments have led to a better understanding of what works and what doesn't, so now with games like Cruise For A Corpse and the forthcoming Another World, Delphine is at last achieving its ideals.

The tricks used within the games' animation sequences are really little more than imitations of the camera techniques used in conventional movie-making, and viewed like that it seems like a pretty cheap trick - but it works. Intercutting between shots, focus-pulling and slow panning over panoramic scenes are all techniques that have been employed to great atmospheric effect. A current favourite of Delphine's, although one that often seems to have been included for its own sake is the shot where a character walks right up to camera, completely obscuring it, then the scene quickly cuts and the same character is seen walking away down the rest of the landscape, as if he has walked right through the lens. Actually, it looks a bit crap - but then so does the original camera shot (which hardly ever gets used these days) on which it was based. After all, they used it in The Professionals opening credits sequence every week, so its a bit moth-eaten by now.

Many of the audio/visual techniques that are used to create atmosphere and tension in movies *can* and *do* work equally well in games. A game doesn't need to play like a film in order to be cinematic - it just has to feel like one.

Of course, if any kind of software is obliged to be cinematic in style, it's that most hated and downtrodden sub-genre, the film licence. Because its inspiration (at least commercially) comes directly from a movie, the potential for emulation is far

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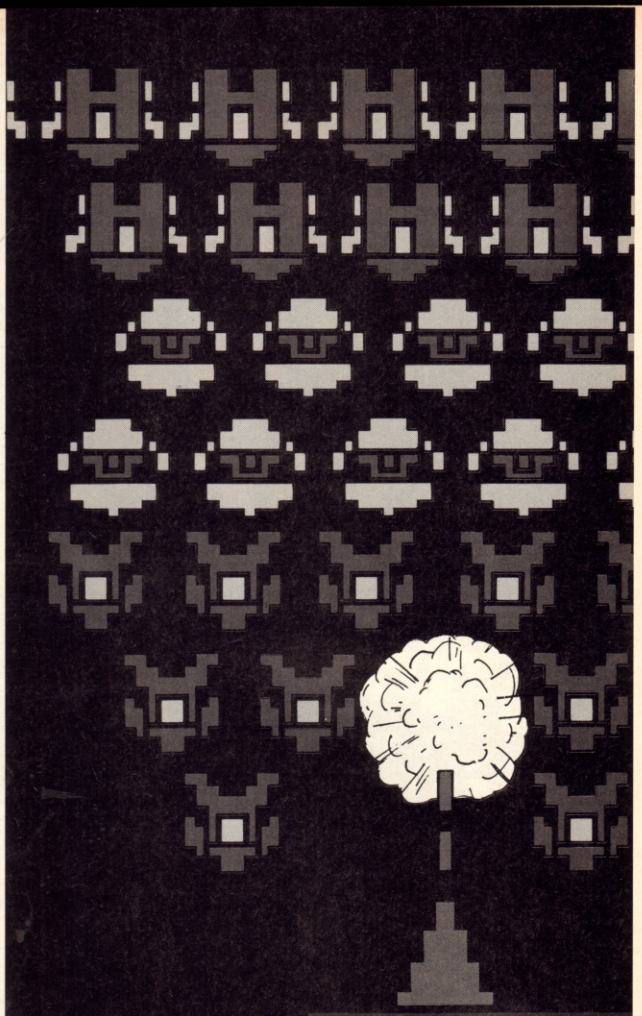

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DOMARK

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Programmed by Simis

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UZI 9 MILLIMETRE!

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery - and in the case of The Terminator, Probe Software were very flattering indeed. In order to provide the up-and-coming Megadrive game with an attract sequence that really did attract, the boys studied the movie's high-tech openning credits, where the giant metal letters that spell the word TERMINATOR scroll past each other in the background, and reproduced it exactly for the game. The credits themselves have been changed to apply to the programming and design team, but other than that everything is identical - right down to the way that the words track across the screen then flicker away, computer-style. The crowning glory is the music, which is a commendable remix of the film's powerful, ominous theme tune. Of course it's a cheap trick, but who cares? There can be no denying that it works brilliantly, psyching the player up right from the very start and giving the game that all-important superficial cinematic feel.

greater than with original "interactive movies", which are basically just a hotch-potch of techniques borrowed from films in the relevant genre.

Where there's just a single, identified source, as is the case with a film licence, the designers have almost unlimited scope with which to produce something that really does look, sound and/or feel like the movie it's based on, because the basis is that much more obvious. Unfortunately for the most part all we get are assembly-line disasters like Darkman and Nightbreed - but that's more the fault of sloppy design than fundamental flaws in the concept of licenced software.

Though more serious movies, like Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now, are often considered unsuitable for software adaptation, there's no reason why the Dynamix or Cinematique approach, of producing a playable adventure game and swamping it in cinematic sound and visuals (in the style of the source film, naturally) to provide the atmosphere. So how about it, you software barons...?

More often than not it's the whole licence "thing" that has to carry the can when a poor film tie-in is murdered by the magazines, even though with the majority of films, the software potential has been far higher than the hexidecimal cobblers that normally turns up. Die Hard is a fine example - what could have been a belter of a platform-based shoot'em-up (the film was, after all, set in a multi-storey skyscraper) eventually appeared as a snail's-pace vector graphics arcade adventure that, in terms of feel would have been more suited to Terms of Endearment than John McTiernan's action rollercoaster.

For a film licence to succeed as a film licence, it has to transfer the elements that people remember from the movie so that it will revive those memories - if a film is "fast", like Die Hard or Predator, the game should match that speed. Atmosphere is easy to recreate, through lighting, point of view and, often most importantly, music and sound, so that the player experiences, if only in a diluted form, some of the same tension and excitement that he got when watching the movie. Because the two mediums are so far apart technically, it's difficult to imagine a game having an atmosphere equivalent to that of the film - but it can and does work. Games like Lucasfilm's interpretation of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and, to a greater extent the original UK-produced version of Aliens prove it.

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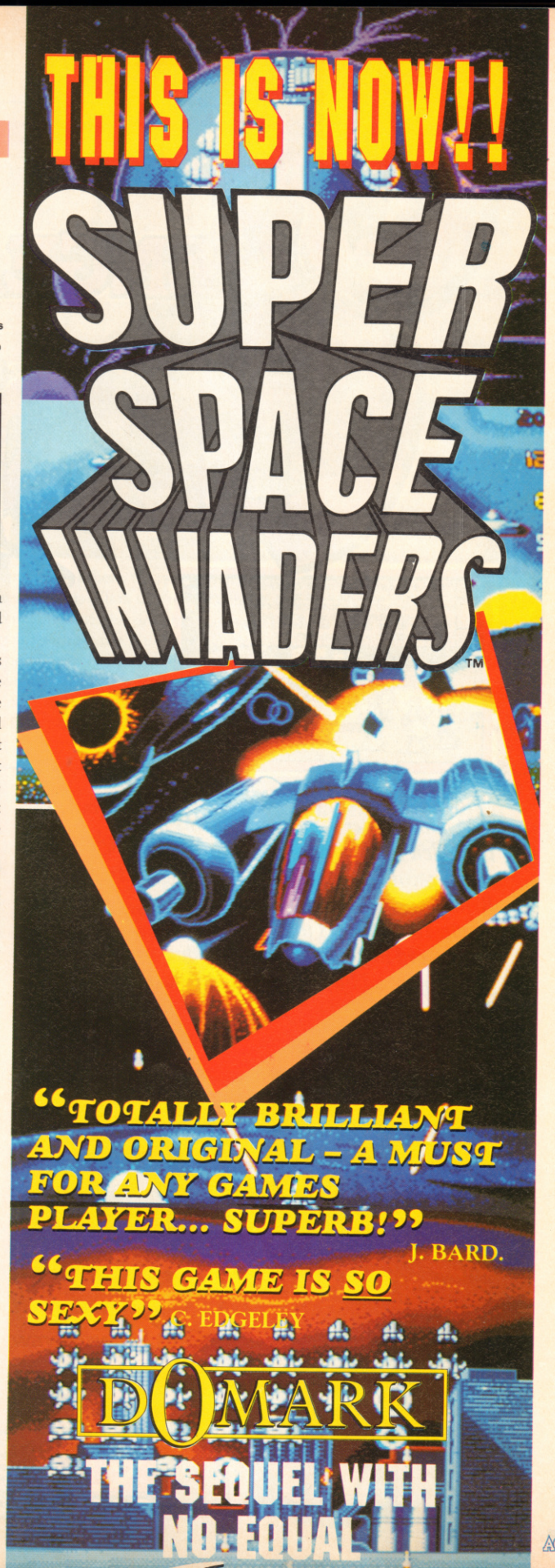

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The whole point of creating cinema-realism can be taken further - people who get shot on the big screen don't miraculously flicker away as they hit the ground, so why should it be any different in the software incarnation? And why, for example, in Total Recall, do the bullets only travel fractionally faster than the characters themselves? Compromises like these only dilute the player's sense of involvement. It's not as if the software has to be gratuitously and graphically violent in order to keep up with the movie's body count, but some effort should at least be made to accurately reflect that side of the film.

In a film like The Terminator, where everything hangs on the intensity of the violence, there's really no other way to do the game if the feel of the film is going to be captured. Probe Software, who are producing the forthcoming Megadrive version for Virgin Games, deserve a slap on the back for preserving, albeit in a slightly watered-down way, that violent feel, which in turn helps to provide a sense of peril.

Most of the time though, such an approach has to be boycotted if not only to ensure that it doesn't cause trouble with the various distributors and stockists, but because of pressure put on by the licencees. Games based on films where the violence is all the more "real", such as The Untouchables and The Godfather, have often had to be toned down because the film company doesn't approve. But why? What are they so worried about?

Sega's hologram-driven coin-op Time Traveller is a very interesting oddity - as a game it's no more playable than Dragon's Lair, but the audio and visual effects, which are well up to cinema standard, are so good that they convey a very powerful hairs-on-the-back-of-the-neck sense of "being there". It's worth a quid just for the experience, and it also shows that live-action footage and "real" CD sound can at least be useful for providing dazzling effects - if not very much else.

Contrary to what the cynics may believe, the two mediums are getting closer, in terms of how they're executed, how they're perceived and - most importantly - how they thrill and entertain their audience. Though there's still no concrete news on any of the game-to-film rumours that have been flying about over the last few months (remember Dustin Hoffman as Leisure Suit Larry and Danny DeVito as Mario?), given the ever-rising worldwide popularity of Nintendo and the medium in general, the first game-inspired movie can't be too far away. And if that ball ever gets rolling, it should bring the worlds of cinema and software closer still. And then we'll really see some action. And camera. And lights...

● **Gary Whitta**

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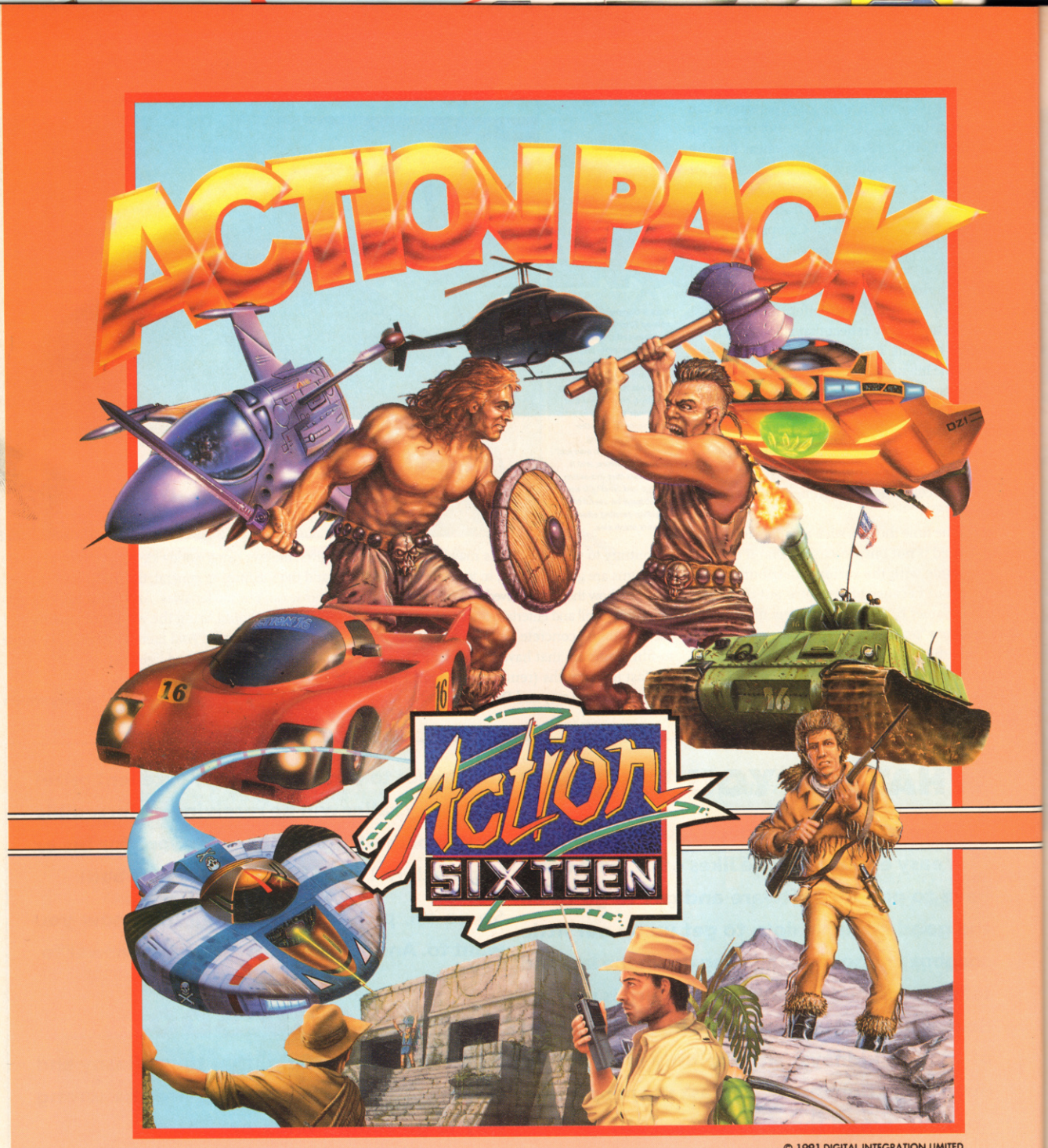

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SHADOW LANDS

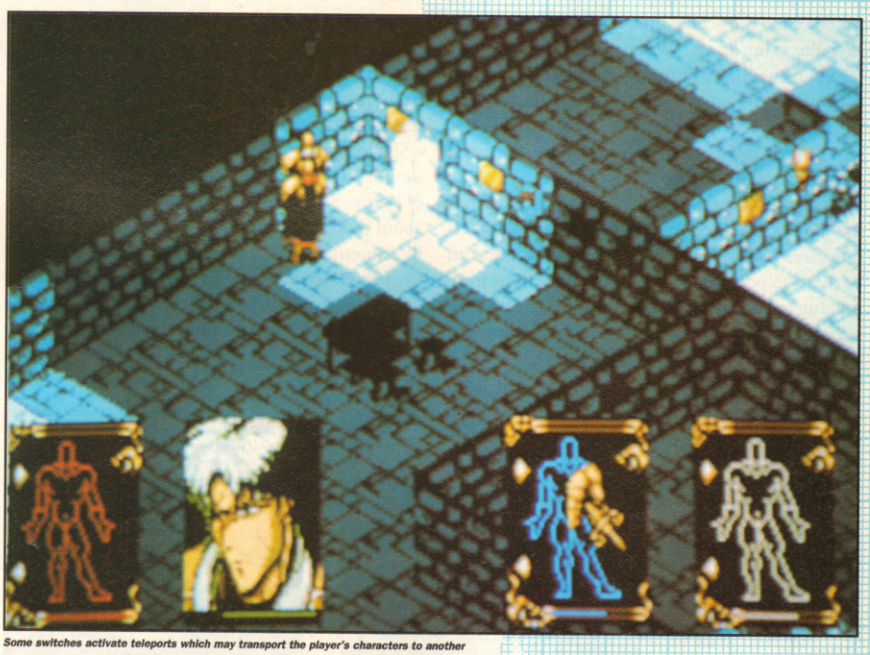
Just what is the secret of a good isometric-3D role-playing game? Teque London, developers of Shadowlands for Domark, think they know. ACE travelled into the heart of the East End to shed a little light on the work so far...

It seems like the World and his wife are trying to get their fingers into the 'user friendly' RPG pie, especially those with an isometric-3D twist. In the last couple of months alone we've seen Core's Heimdall and Millennium's Robin Hood, and it wasn't that long ago that Imagework's Cadaver and EA's Immortal were doing the (highly-successful) rounds.

But all these games suffer from one major flaw - there's only one central character. Of course, in any 'normal' game this is par for the course, but in an RPG game it's tantamount to blasphemy. Ask any RPG aficionado and they'll tell you that it's the fact that players are members of a party of two or more characters that make the games so special. Admittedly Heimdall has a 'theoretical' party of three trundling about, but since only one member is ever seen on-screen at any time that point gets rather lost.

However, this point certainly hasn't been lost on Teque London, software developers for Domark (among others). Down in the heart of the East End, the team are tweaking and refining a stunning new isometric-3D RPG system that could provide a welcome shot in the arm for a genre that's become a little stagnant.

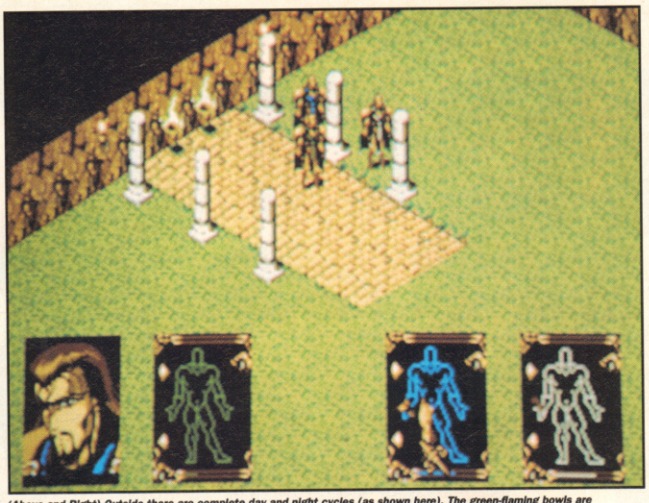
The team are quite open in their admiration for Dungeon Master, and there are various aspects of Shadowlands that smack of FTL's classic. Even the plot, about a disembodied spirit attempts guiding a party of four adventurers through a series of dungeons in an attempt to recover its body, seems strangely familiar. Dean Lester, Teque's MD, explains: "We all loved Dungeon Master but I don't think any of us had actually sat down and read the scenario properly. It was only after we'd come up with our plot that the similarities were pointed out to us." Whatever, the over-seeing spirit idea does at least give a logical (within the fantasy world context) explanation for the bird's-eye view of the action.



Some switches activate teleports which may transport the player's characters to another area or warp a swarm of nasties in. In this case, the unfortunate blue party member is whisked off to a distant lonely room in a flash of light.

Visually Shadowlands big selling-point is what Teque are calling, ahem, Photoscape. It's a unique light-modelling system whereby every illuminated object throws out its own pool of light. As any objects or creatures outside the light are shown as mysterious silhouettes, it's a incredibly effective way of generating intense mood and atmosphere. Just what is that shuffling towards you? Only one way to find out. And as the party's torches slowly burn down to guttering flames, the pool of light slowly draws in around them until they are left stumbling over each other in the semi-darkness.

But the important thing about Photoscape is that it isn't just a superficial graphics trick. Some monsters are affected in various differing ways by the presence or absence of light, and light sensors in the walls may open or close traps or have a myriad of other effects.



(Above and Right) Outside there are complete day and night cycles (as shown here). The green-flaming bowls are reincarnation altars, where players can bring their slain companions for rejuvenation. Some are found on the player's travels, while others may be guarded or require some form of payment for their use.

Shadowlands is being programmed by Barry Costas primarily on the ST using the SNASM development system on the IBM PC, with an Amiga conversion to follow. As you can see from the screenshots, the light pools are blocky around the edges rather than being circular. It's a necessary compromise - circles would be too time-consuming to draw and seriously slow the game down. "When we first had the idea for the game, Barry did some calculations to see if it would go fast enough," points out Dean. "Shadowlands is now running just about as fast as an ST can go. It's all a case of compromising between the best graphical effect and speed."

On top of this aesthetic splendour, Shadowlands has one of the most elegant and friendly user-interfaces I've ever seen in an RPG. Characters can be made to perform a whole range of actions from walking to picking up objects to pulling a switch by simply clicking a couple of times with the mouse button. Items can be put into each character's backpack, pulled out or swapped around with ease. It's a complete joy to use.

Another nice point about the game is that because the party members can be directed individually if needs be, there's a real RPG 'feel' to the game, that the party is a band of very different characters. Because of this, there's a degree of multi-tasking where one character can be doing one thing in one area of the game while another is doing something completely different somewhere else. Thus while three of the players are laying waste to a party of trolls, the fourth party-member could be getting to some health-restoring kip in a safe room.

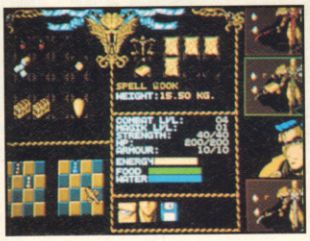
Shadowlands has been in development for eight months now, and the path hasn't been easy. "Lots of elements seemed easy to code when we thought about them but were hard when it came to doing it," laments Dean. A particular example of this is the pits. Objects or people thrown down them have to appear in a certain point on the level below. Sounds easy, but when you have several pits on a level they all have to relate to each other physically and the actual job of passing the object data between levels is a pig.

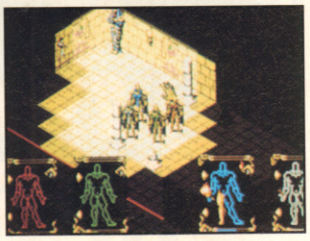
With Shadowlands not due for release until March of next year, it's already looking remarkably polished and... well... finished. "If the level maps were done the game would only be about a month away," agrees Dean, "It's just a case of getting all the graphics done now." All at Teque seem very pleased with what they've achieved. "We wanted Shadowlands to be the RPG that we always wanted to play - a combination of both Gauntlet and Dungeon Master. Of course, we still can't play it because we're the ones who have written it," sighs Dean. Shadowlands is an impressive change of direction for Teque, who are probably best known for their coin-op conversions. Take my word for it, this is going to be very, very big indeed. And that's without a shadow of a doubt.

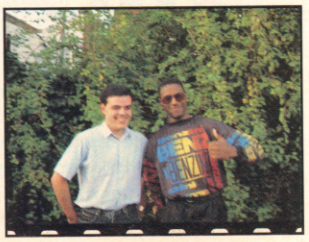
● **David Upchurc**

(Right) The inventory screen. It bears many similarities to Dungeon Masters and is as easy to use. Note the two mini chessboards at the bottom-left of the screen. The player can arrange the coloured pawns representing the players anyway he likes, thus altering the party formation and even allowing it to be split into two teams (often an essential requirement for some puzzles).

(Far right) In the pyramid the walls are lined with hieroglyphics and sarcophagi. Teque intend the game to be made up of about fourteen levels, divided between the three major interior sections (dungeons, caves and the pyramid) and two major outdoors ones. Although large, the game structure is fairly linear, i.e. you won't be able to get to the second level of the dungeon until you've done all the important stuff on the first. "If you leave a game really open it sounds good in theory," points out Dean, "but in practice the player ends up getting too many choices and wandering around in circles. It's important to have some form of structure to the game."

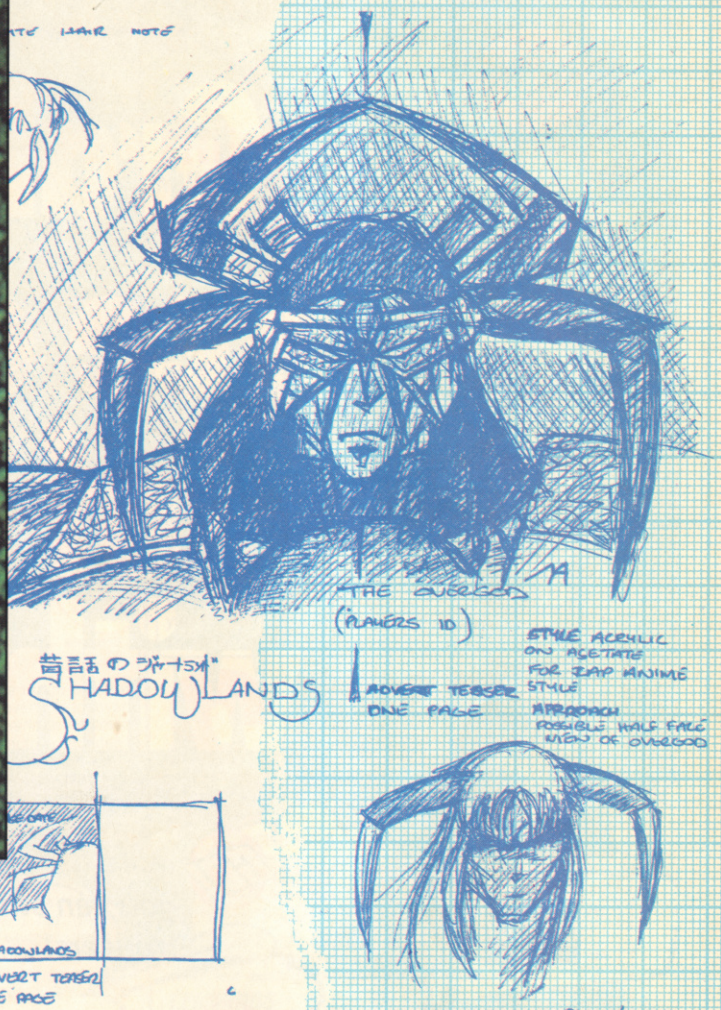






(Left) Teque's Shadowlands team: The programmer Barry Costas (left) and the classically-named graphics artist Mark Anthony. Barry's worked on games ranging from Domark's Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters to Krisalis' Revelations, while Shadowlands is Mark's first major project.

(Far left) Potions ahoy! Ah, but what do they do? Although you can't see it here there's an empty water flask to the left of the party that can be filled from the fountain set in the wall. After all, it's thirsty work all this dungeoneering.



THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE...

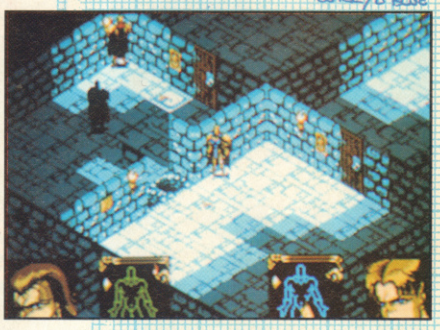
Photoscape (no '™' yet, but apparently they're working on it) is too nice a graphics system to use on just one game, so it comes as no surprise to learn that there are already plans afoot for another Photoscape game. Well, this is the fantasy game, so surely the cliché would be to do a space game next, right? Slightly embarrassed smiles all round at Teque. "Sorry to say," smiles Dean, "but that's exactly what we'd thought of."

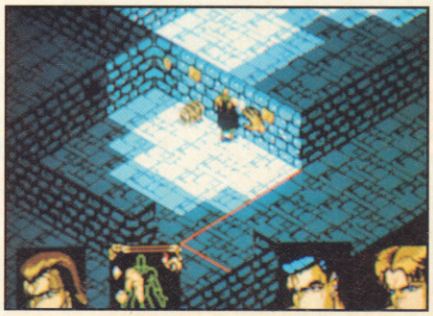
Apparently plans are afoot to do an Aliens-style game, featuring a band of space marines on a mission to explore a dank, deserted (of humans) space ship. The light would comes from lamps mounted on their helmets. In theory it's sounds like it would work brilliantly, especially with all the aliens moving about half-seen in the darkness.

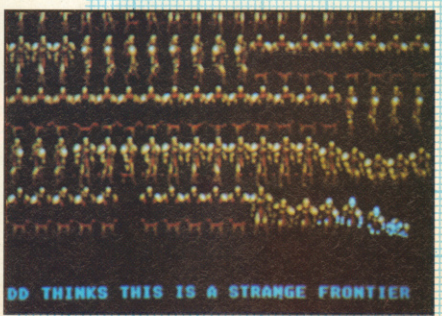
(Right) Unlike Dungeon Master, the party actually are a party, i.e. they're four individuals rather than a massed bunch of statistics and abilities. And thus the four characters can be split up any way the player sees fit - although this tends to occur due to the machinations of the game designers rather than because the player wishes it. Here the characters have been transported to two rooms separated by some pits. Each room contains a locked door and a key... to the other room's door. The characters must throw the keys across the pits - and woe betide them if they fall in. (N.b. note the alternative positioning of the character windows.)

(Below) One of the best things about Shadowlands is that it's packed with lots of things to do. If the player isn't finding a band of monsters then he's solving a puzzle, there's very little trudging through endless identikit corridors. Here, for example, there are two slots ready and waiting to accept some of the player's coins - but what will the results be?

(Below right) Most of the animation frames for the party characters. There are five animation frames for each action (i.e. walking, picking things up). Given that characters must be animated for each of the eight possible facings, it doesn't take a mathematical genius to work out that that's a lot of frames.







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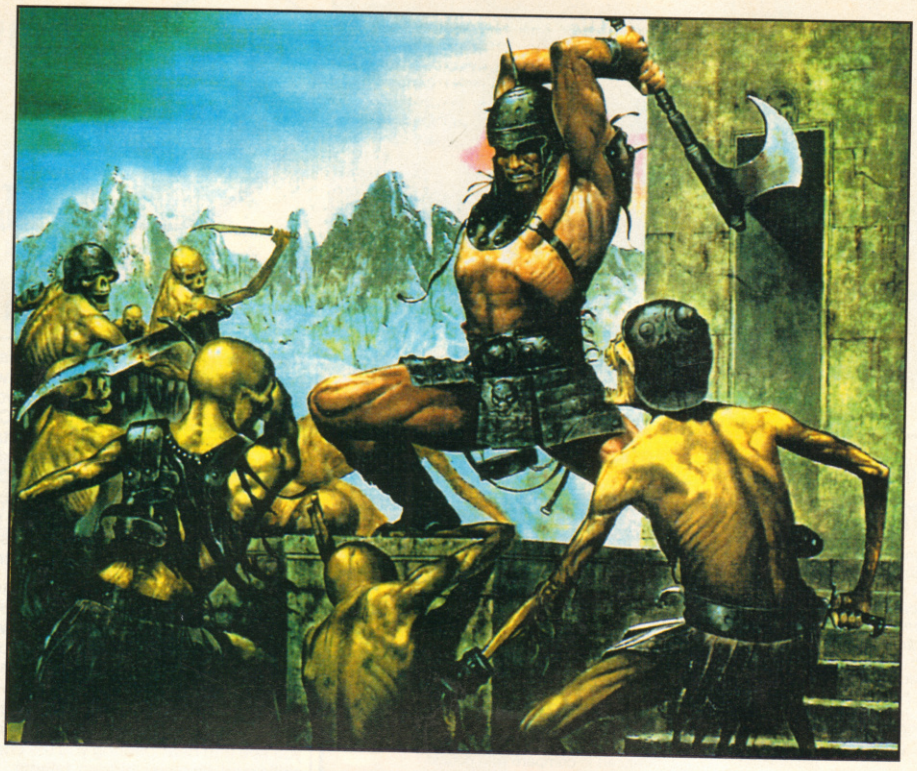


(Left) That console feel in full effect. The Grecian level is the clearest example of the big, clear feel which System 3 were after. There's a puzzle being solved here too, as Achilles' heel is chopped away revealing... well, you'll just have to wait, won't you?

MYTH

Since being awarded a Golden Joystick back in 1989 as Best 8-Bit Game of the Year, Myth has been under continual change and revision as System 3 endeavours to turn its novelty hit into a full blown 16-bit epic. Now the work is nearing completion...

You know the scene in the Ipcress File when Harry Palmer is being brainwashed by enemy agents? They're trying to break down his resistance to their own way of thinking by using ghastly aural torture techniques. Talking to System 3 frontman Adrian Cale is a surprisingly similar experience. In Myth's case, Cale's doggedly-determined promotion of his product at last has a solid foundation, since it's shaping up to be one of the best 8-bit to 16-bit conversions for years.

In its Spectrum and C64 incarnations, Myth was the story of an innocent youth transported back through a mystical vortex to eponymously mythical times. In order to return to his everyday existence, our hero had to complete a number of tasks - killing Medusas, Hydras, etc - while progressing through a suite of different time zones and locations. The game was fantastically well received by both press and public, and 16-bit versions were underway before you could spit.

However, Myth has been a long time in development, and with a brace of similarly heroic games slated for uncomfortably-close release dates, those at Ver System must surely be nervous about releasing what is essentially an upgraded version of a game that is two years old?

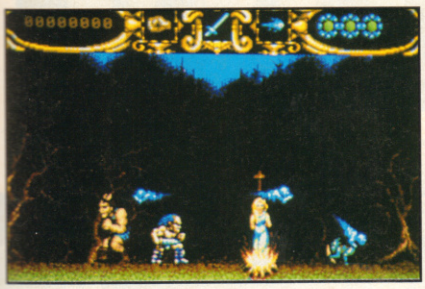
Not so, according to Adrian Cale: "Yes, the game has been in development for a long time and this, in a way, has helped us by allowing our designers to invest more and more valuable man hours into creating a product which should appeal to the new market, two years on from the 8-bit version.

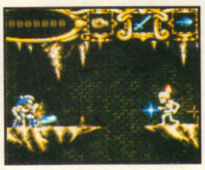
"The game has long since surpassed the label of a 'conversion' and has gone on to be developed more and more for the specific 16-bit market, so as to become a major stand-alone product in it's own right. The game's features have been greatly enhanced and more and more has been added to really try and push the Amiga in much the same way the C64 version pushed that machine.

"With astonishing fight moves and full contact SFX, the newer arcade feel is amazing. There are animations within this game the likes of which we have never seen before, and a piano sample theme music as crisp as you are likely to hear on the Amiga. The sheer scale of Myth with its titanic monsters and dramatic set pieces really puts it in a league of its own. Games such as First Samurai use very different techniques and more regulated sprite sizes."

Quite. System 3's determination to turn Myth into a high-profile, mass-market, plenty of heat and point-of-sale creation has even gone so far as involving a complete change of the central character. Out goes the boy next door with his T-shirt and jeans, and in comes a huge loin-clothed barbarian with the most peculiar muscle groups you've ever seen. Why?

"All the kids in the playground are boasting about their latest Mega Drive game, so we want to give the guy with an Amiga a game about which he can say, 'Yeah, but have you seen this?'" explains Adrian.

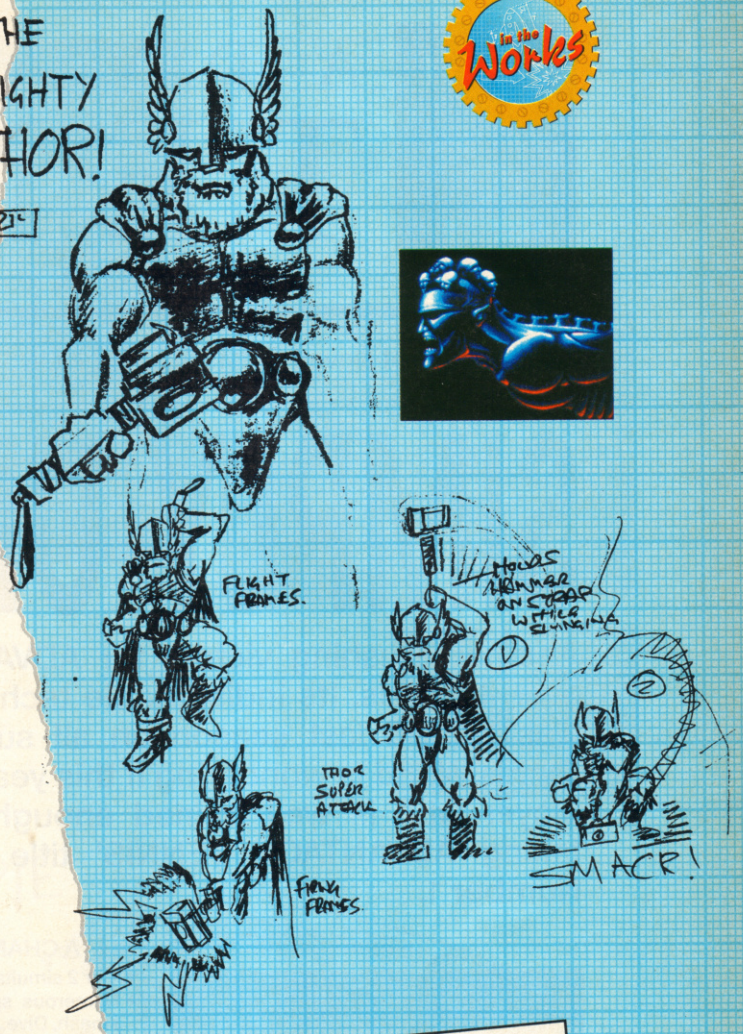




(Top) The part of the game the programming team is most pleased with - 27 sprites all moving in unison. Hooray!

(Middle) Combat moves have been simplified for ease of use in frenetic fight situations.

(Above) System 3 are confident that the variety and more importantly, size of the graphics will apeal to the tastes of the older, 16 bit audience.



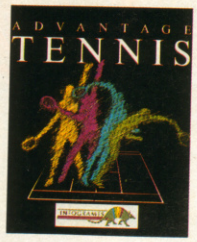
"With that in mind, the change of central character into a squat, hard bastard with an array of extremely violent fighting moves seemed a natural progression and an obvious enhancement when addressing this as a console-style game."

Further changes have been made to the graphic style of the game, switching from a Lemmings-scale set up to a more conventional sprite size. Even though the tiny graphics were partly responsible for the appeal of the first game, the team remains adamant that this new direction is correct. Continues Adrain: "The 16-bit graphics are a great improvement on the original version. The major nasties have been enlarged whilst the human characters remain small and vulnerable. The scale of the game remains epic, and the sinister atmosphere greatly enhanced. The demon that resides in the Hell level takes up half the screen, as do the Hydra and Dameron sprites."

Escalating the depth of puzzles in the game, argues Cale, will both increase the longevity of the play without slowing down the arcade action feel. Most of the puzzles in Myth are based around legends and some general knowledge as to the weaknesses of mythical monsters is a definite player advantage. There are also some graphical clues dotted around the levels which will point all but the most dim players in the right direction. An effort has been made to ensure the puzzles are progressive in nature and that the player doesn't get bogged down simply by being unaware of his next objective.

Adrian elaborates: "There are different styles of arcade adventure. A game with a sprawling mass explorational feel would fall into our tried and tested Last Ninja series of games. This tends to put the game's emphasis on strategy and exploration with bucket loads of hacking and slaying. It's a case of

The animations in development. More attention has been paid to the look of this product than any other, claims Cale. Certainly, by the look of the game so far, it's easy enough to believe.



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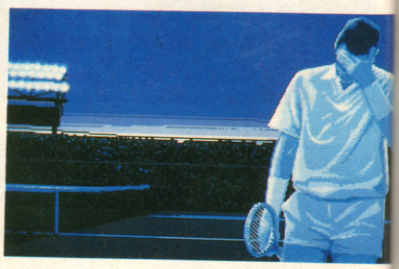

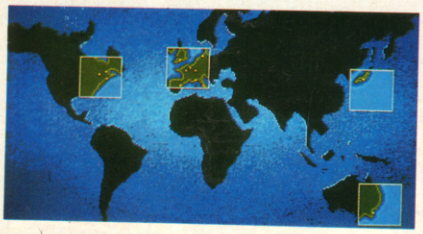

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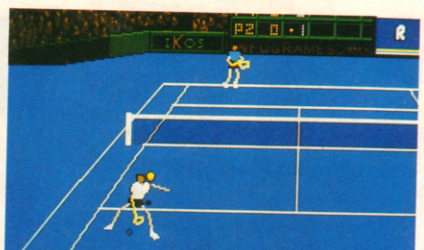
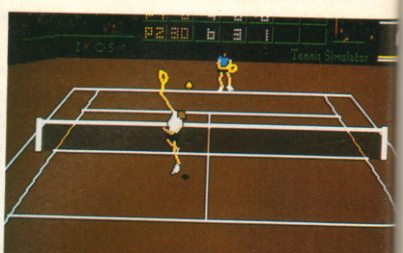
Marvellous high smash on the grass of Wimbledon.



Terrific between-the-legs-stroke on the synthetic surface of Tokyo.



Splendid backhand smash at the net on cl at Roland Garros.

SKI TENNIS FOOTWEAR GOLF
HEAD

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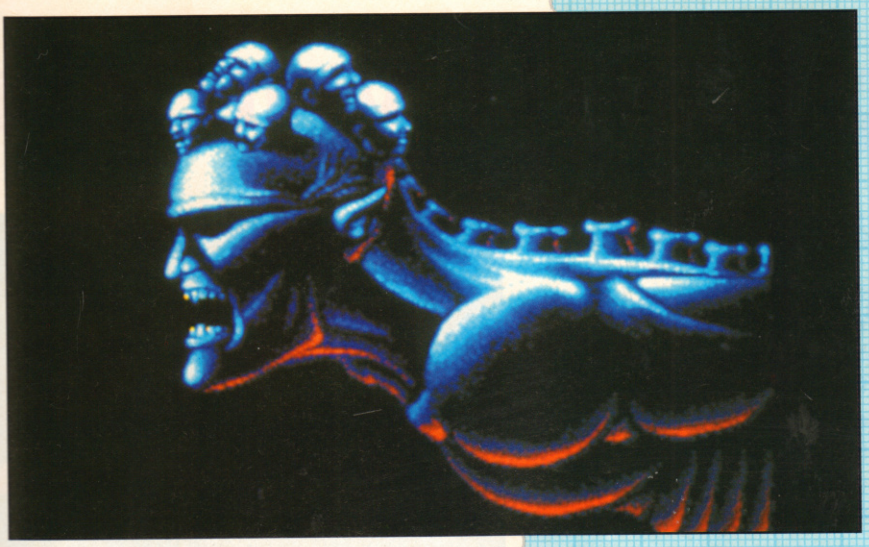


(Left) Although continually under revision, it's likely that Dameron, the evil fiend who must be fought at the very end, will look rather like this. At this point, the game turns into a no-holds-barred shoot-out section.

(Below left) Pitch one of the severed skulls into the fire and just look what you'll end up with! Wooooo!

getting the balance right and so by stretching the existing compact levels we would run the risk of tipping the balance one way or another and damaging the intended overall feel of the game."

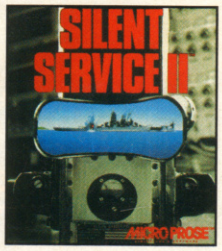
A little over two months away from release, the title is shaping up well, and while final graphic touches are added, most of the final efforts are being exerted on compressing the sizable data files. In fact, the folks at System 3 are rather proud of their techniques... "The game runs a Dynamic Memory allocation system similar to the Amiga operating system. This means we can easily shift the bias for each level between sound effects, music and graphics. We've got up to 25 sprites forming the graphics for one monster, all animating and moving around."

The code with which the programmers are most pleased is also the piece which they found the most challenging. Driving and animating the three-headed hydra sprites at the end of level three was the toughest part of the job. The creature features the most intense sprite usage, each one having to move around and work in unison with the others. One error in the movement patterns for any sprite would have left the sinister attack moves of the Hydra looking feeble and useless.

It has to be said that the animations, combat scenes and 'mood' of the piece look fantastic. And System 3's desire to be viewed as a high-end games publisher rather than merchants of interminably re-hashed combat games may be finally within reach.

● **Jim Douglas**

What will you chan



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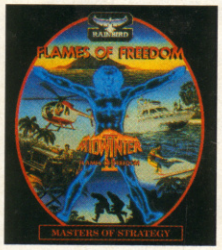

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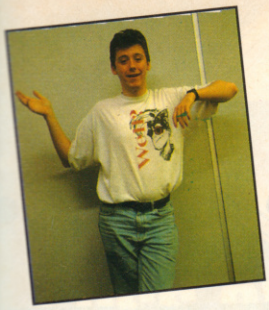


Gary Whitta's previews.....

Alwight? Alwight? Alwight at the back? I'm alwight! U Alwight?

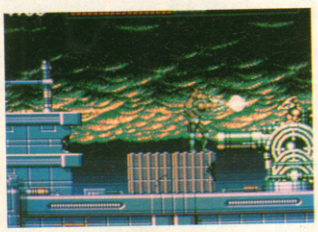
Actually, I'll tell you what is "alwight", and that's all the classy product that will soon be winging its way towards a software shop near you. There's bugger all up the pictures, and the telly's a load of crap, especially on Wednesdays, so it's a good thing that the software scene is looking seasonally healthy as the run up to Christmas enters its second lap. So, prepare to be amazed as we say "Two adults, please" to the scruffy gypsy in the booth at the entrance of the Software Funfare!

DUNE Virgin Games

Though David Lynch's cinematic interpretation of Frank Herbert's best-selling science-fiction novel was an unmitigated disaster - although how anybody could expect a film about a big desert and lots of stupid worms to be a success is beyond me. Whatever, the official licenced game is at last with us, courtest of Virgin and French developers Cryo. It takes the form of an animated graphical adventure, not a million miles away from the sort turned out by Lucasfilm and Delphine, but with an innovative strategy element bolted on too.It's certainly very pretty, and boasts a stunning cinema-style soundtrack. ST, Amiga and PC versions are due out next Easter - and keep an eye out for Sting, who makes a cameo appearance as he did in the movie.

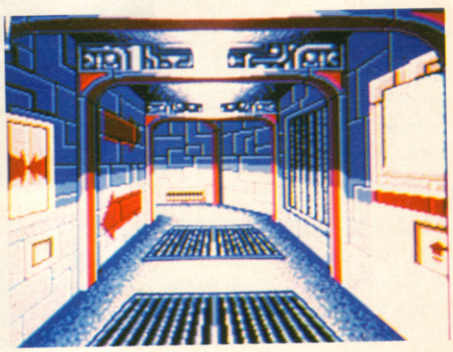
WOLFCHILD Core Design

Simon Phipps is generally regarded as the king of console-style platform action games. The man behind Switchblade and the awesome Rick Dangerous series must be doing something right, after all. Now the genius with the excellent hairstyle is busily beavering away on what promises to be his masterpiece to date. In a nutshell, Wolfchild is an all-action arcade adventure that's best described as a cross between Rick Dangerous and Strider, encompassing many of the Japanese influences and touches that are Phipps' trademark. Technically it's astounding - 64 on-screen colours, 360 degree multi-layer parallax scrolling and some of the fastest, smoothest movement ever seen on a computer screen. The game's name derives from Saul (the hero)'s ability to transform into a man-wolf creature to help him deal with his adversaries as he battles through the game's five levels and 300+ screens. Wolfchild will be released in time for Christmas on ST and Amiga - a festive number one, perhaps?



SUSPICIOUS CARGO Gremlin

What with the success of Wonderland, Monkey Island and Sierra's wares of late, the adventure game is fast coming back into vogue - and Gremlin's forthcoming addition to the genre promises to be one of the tastiest examples of the genre so far. It's space-based, icon-driven and allegedly comes with a sense of humour, provided by the game's main character, freewheeling space pilot Jonah Hayes. The plot has you, as Hayes, attempting to smuggle a very dodgy dodgy consignment of genetic experiments across the cosmos while avoiding the attentions of the various galactic authorities. Similar in style and presentation to Gremlin's earlier space adventure BSS Jane Seymour, Suspicious Cargo combines elements of Dungeon Master style RPG adventuring with a traditional text-input adventure parser and even a couple of arcade and puzzle-based subgames. It's out at the end of November.



TURBO CHARGE System 3

After a long period of relative inaction, System 3 is starting to get its act back together again, and one of the Pinner-based firm's more promising coming attractions is this rather natty race-n-chase effort, originally titled Border

Gary Whitta's previews.....

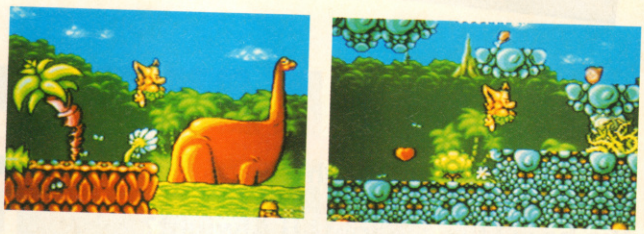
and set in the world of international drug dealing. The player takes the role of some top secret agent or something, who must drive his souped-up Lambourghini Countach, Chase HQ style, over a series of deadly highways in pursuit of the powder-pushing perverts. There are lots of bolt-on weapons to collect and bad guys aplenty to use them on, so action all round is guaranteed. Remember the awful Fire and Forget? What we're promised here is a decent version of that - ie proper speed, decent explosions and all the attendant neat little touches. Get yourself under starters orders for its release at the start of the new year.

CORPORATION Virgin Games

It rocketed to number one on the Amiga and put debut publishers Core Design up there with the software big boys when it was released last year - and now Megadrive owners can sample the delights of Kevin Bulmer's brilliant arcade adventure Corporation courtesy of Virgin. It's been converted by Core themselves, so you can be sure of a good job, and for the most part everything remains the same - although the 16-bit wundermachine has come up with some slightly prettier graphics and the 3D update is likely to be a bit nippier. Quite how Corporation's involved gameplay and sinister atmosphere will go down with action-orientated Megadrive gamers remains to be seen, but if my guess is right they should snap up the opportunity to do something a bit more interesting than hammer away on the fire button for a change. The release date's been set for the early part of 1992.

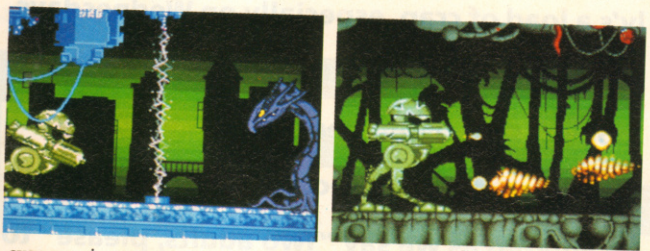
CHUCK ROCK Virgin Games

Universally regarded as one of Core Design's best games to date, it comes as no surprise to learn that the comical arcade adventure Chuck Rock has been selected for conversion to the Megadrive - critics raved over its console-style gameplay, so in a sense it's being given a more appropriate home on cartridge. Gary Gritter is back in all his glory, this time with a set of all-new aesthetic touches to make his adventures all the more pretty. Look out in particular for the supah multi-level parallax scrolling, which gives the game a hitherto-unrecognised arcadey feel. Like Corporation, Chuck Rock will be hitting the streets in the first quarter of 1992. At least that's what the software people say, bugger knows what it means...



UNDER PRESSURE Electronic Zoo

Eldritch The Cat, creators of the excellent futuristic sports simulation Projectyle, returns to the software fray with Under Pressure, a very strange game indeed. In it the player is casts as the pilot of a giant (and I mean giant, take a look at the pics) ED-209 type robot walker thing, who must blast his way through a series of alien worlds to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend. Admittedly it's pretty simplistic stuff, but extra elements, such as a variety of vicious bolt-on weaponry and the occasional puzzle promise to make it all the more compelling. And though the gameplay may not be all that innovative, the graphics certainly are, as Under Pressure boasts some of the largest sprites



ever seen in a computer game. With a bit of luck, it'll be out by the end of the year, so you 16-bitters keep an eye out, y'hear?

INDY HEAT Storm

Fans of the very excellent Super Offroad Racer will be more than chuffed to hear that there's another top-down arcade racer on the way, once again converted from a Leland coin-op (they did the original Offroad machine as well, you see). But there's no more messing around on dirt tracks here - Indy Heat is set in the rather more glamorous world of grand prix racing, with four cars battling it out over 15 increasingly tortuous single-screen tracks. There are lots of neat touches, such as the ability to customise cars and working pit-stops, plus there's a juicy three (and possibly even four) player simultaneous race option, so you can get together with your mates for a real demolition derby. Converted by the same top geezers that did Rodland and SWIV, Indy Heat goes on the grid in January next year.

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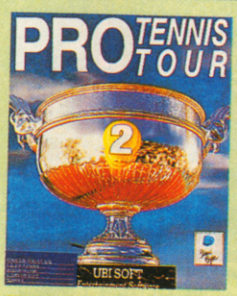

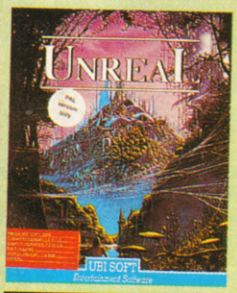

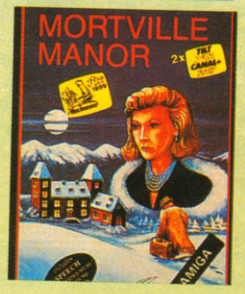

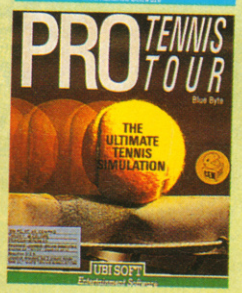

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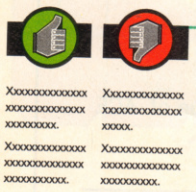
Every word of the review is intended to help *you* decide whether the game is for you or not. The body text is combined with a plethora of handy icons to offer at-a-glance information.

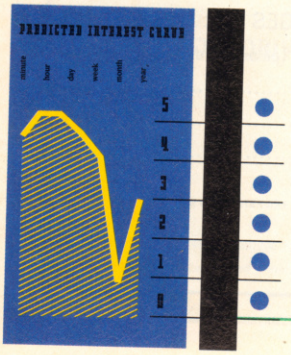
Each game is **compared and contrasted** to another title as an easy frame of reference. Most commonly, it will be compared to the best its particular genre.



The **Thumbs up and Down** box details particular elements which may or may not appeal - the toughness of the bad guys, number of levels, long-term appeal etc.

The ACE Rating – a score out of 1,000 – is the most instant gauge of the quality of the game.

An **ACE Trailblazer** award goes to games scoring over 900. These are recommended without hesitation. They are "must buys".



Titles which excel in a particular area also stand the chance of being awarded a **Sound, Graphics or Idea award** (for innovation).

There's even beginners' **hints** to get you through the early stages should you buy the game that month and can't wait for our detailed tips the following issue.

Finally, the **PIC curve** details our feelings as to the longevity of the game.

ACE BENCHMARKS

The games listed here are the very best of their particular genre. The benefits of your being fully acquainted with our Benchmarks are twofold.

The Benchmarks provide a solid reference point when it comes to games buying time. By glancing at our description of the benchmark, you'll be able to decide if particular differences in the new game's design would make the new title more or less appealing for you.

Also, no software collection is complete unless it contains *all* the games listed here. If you're missing any of these titles, go and remedy the situation immediately.

SWIV (Storm)

The follow-up to *Silkworm* succeeds through a combination of frenetic speed, polished presentation and sheer, unadulterated action. Tons and tons of it. The firepower and wastage on screen is of a level that far exceeds anything offered before. A £25 coin-op with no coins!

GODS (Renegade)

While it may be argued that it's not as intrinsically sophisticated as the likes of *Rick Dangerous 2* or *Prince of Persia*, the Bitmap Brothers' platform opus does offer enough fully-rounded arcade action to make it the outright winner in this category. Classy and depthy.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (US Gold/SSI)

By the mighty sword of Kring! SSI's latest *Dungeons and Dragons* game takes the best bits of *Dungeon Master*, adds a few more its own, stirs well, and the result is the best yet for gamers into the whole fantasy genre. Will SSI rule the RPG land forever?

KICK OFF 2 (Anco)

What can we say? It's pretty pointless trying to explain to the initiated what makes Kick Off 2 so damned playable, but the primary reasons are untra-instrinctive ball control mode and remarkable speed which combine to make it as exciting as the real game!

RAILROAD TYCOON (Microprose)

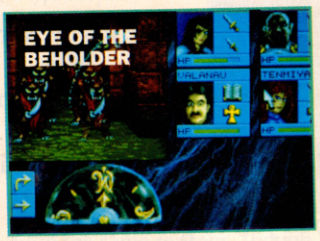
Building a railroad empire may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is FUN FUN FUN! Plenty of fiscal manipulations and turn-of-the-century power broking for budding industrialists.

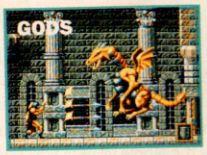
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (US Gold/Lucasfilm)

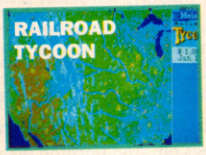
Partly due to the new refined version of the SCUMM adventure system and partly due to the excellent, and very funny script, this is the most engaging and entertaining adventure game for years. But will Monkey Island 2 take its crown?

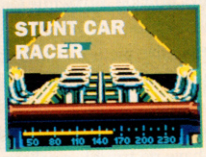
FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX (Microprose)

A new Benchmark! So perfect it's almost impossible to find any fault in this awesome game from Geoff Crammond. Packed with helpful pointers for novices and lots of detail for experienced racers, it will keep you driving for *years*.









IK+ (System 3)

An upgraded and enhanced version of the original System 3 classic, Archer Maclean's IK+ is still unchallenged in its field after three years. Its most innovative spect is the addition of a third, computer controlled fighter. Incredible speed and subgames.

STUNT CAR RACER (Microstyle)

Stunt Car Racer packs polygon-plotting power and arcade-speed thrills into a novel formula. Drive around elevated raceways, smashing and crashing your opponent into oblivion. Growling audio and a weird look add novelty value to this class title.

JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER (Virgin)

Archer Maclean does it again, and must go down in the history books as having produced the first ever realistic snooker game. Tremendous 3D combines with authentic play and more options than ever believed possible. An awesomely good game.

CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT(Electronic Arts)

The third game to be endorsed by the barrier-breaking General takes place in a far more enjoyable combat arena. You get to fly every plane you've ever dreamt of and you get to fight every plane you ever thought of too. And all in super sprite'n'polygons graphics!

MEGA lo MANIA (Image Works)

Sensible Software's first attempt at strategy is a surprisingly successful one. At first glance, it may seem similar to *Populous*, but further inspection reveals it to be a genuinely original strategy epic. But will *Populous 2*, due next month, end Mega's brief reign

TETRIS (Nintendo)

There are more official versions of this classic than can be counted on the legs of a millipede. But it's Nintendo's own Gameboy version that is undoubtedly the best. Line up blocks in frenetic black & white action May sound dull but is actually fantastic.

SUPER MARIO WORLD (Nintendo)

The sooner they release the Famicom over here the better, as that will give more chance to experience the stunning fourth instalment in the saga. Sheer perfection from start to end of its ninety=nine levels!

Genre Arcade Adventure
Publisher Core Design
Developer The Eighth Day
Price £30.99

HEIMDALL

Though the horny Norsemen's unofficial European tour may have been somewhat less than subtle, there can be little doubt that they stamped their axe-shaped mark on history with remarkable style. Diplomacy? Pah. When you've got an axe and a sword in one hand, a flaming torch in the other and a beard that looks like it's capable of violence all on its own, people just seem to fall over themselves to accommodate you. And if they don't fall over, you can always give them a hand by chopping their legs off. And burning their house down. And killing their family.

It was (probably) on a cold and windy day somewhere in Norway sometime during the dark ages that somebody probably called something like Erik was hit by the Viking brainwave. Subsequently anyone who could swing a sword and hold their ale changed their names to things like Thorfinn Shinsplitter and the Viking Empire was born. Well, not so much an empire, more a sort of well-organised boot-boys brigade. But while Core's latest - and arguably most elaborate - effort Heimdall paints a much more passive picture of the Nordic hooligans than history would have us believe, it's still a pretty atmospheric affair.

Those who have a passing familiarity with Viking lore should have no trouble swallowing Heimdall's otherwise far-fetched scenario. The centuries-old war that rages between the ethereal forces of good and evil and is destined to decide the fate of mankind takes an unexpected turn for the worse when three of Good's most powerful weapons of war are stolen by the evil Loki, brother of Thor the Thunder God. Odin's sword, Freyr's spear and Thor's legendary hammer have been spirited away into the natural world - where the Gods cannot travel. Without their weapons, the forces of Good are powerless against Loki and his cronies, so they devise a plan to retrieve them by physical means - thus they create an infant human, Heimdall, and send him to Earth to be raised by the Vikings. When he reaches adulthood he will set sail across the Norse islands to recover the weapons of the Gods and realise his divine destiny.

At least that's the theory. The Gods can only influence the physical world so much, and so the fate of the Universe rests almost solely in Heimdall's hands - i.e. yours. Throughout his childhood, Heimdall has little to worry about, apart from participating in a trio of traditional Viking leisure pastimes (which will have a bearing on the main game later - see 'The Trials of Life' box). Once adulthood is reached however, the real adventure begins, with the God's Gift to Vikings setting sail in search of the three weapons. Each one is hidden somewhere within a giant archipelago of islands, and thorough exploration is required to locate and acquire them. In theory Heimdall blends role-playing elements with an arcade adventure theme and throws in a little arcade-style action to provide, if you will, a fully-rounded gaming experience. In practice it's probably best described as *The Immortal* with Vikings in it.

Locating the weapons is a complex affair - in the initial stages Heimdall and five additional crewmen take to the water in their longboat for one of the islands, as chosen from the initial parchment-style map of the archipelago. Practical restrictions - food being the most important - dictate that Heimdall can only sail within a certain range, so only a hand-

The first world map. Hidden somewhere in this giant expanse is the fabled Hammer of Thor. As Heimdall and his crew travels from island to island his route is shown as an Indy-style dotted red line that snakes across the map. Due to food limitations and obstructions both physical and monstrous it isn't possible to just sail directly to the Hammer's location, and Heimdall must achieve a number of mini quests before he can get to where he wants to go. And when he's completed this quest, there's still Freyr's Spear and Odin's Sword to be found in two new and even more dangerous worlds.

(Above) Mystical gates will transport the player to far-flung locations. Where they lead, nobody knows - and that sign isn't much help either.

(Right) Heimdall's motley crew, in all their glory. From here the player can examine items in each character's inventory, and use them in a number of ways to solve the various puzzles and problems encountered. Each crewman's stats can be displayed in either a textual or a graphical form, depending on the player's whim.

ful of islands are accessible at the outset. Reaching the more remote isles is achieved by moving in small steps, from island to island, picking up food for the next voyage during the player's adventure there. Sailing is handled automatically - just select an in-range destination and progress is charted on the map by means of an *Indiana Jones*-style snaking red line. The player may have to apply some navigational skills in order to avoid perils such as a whirlpool (which can maroon the ship if it gets too close) and a malevolent sea monster.

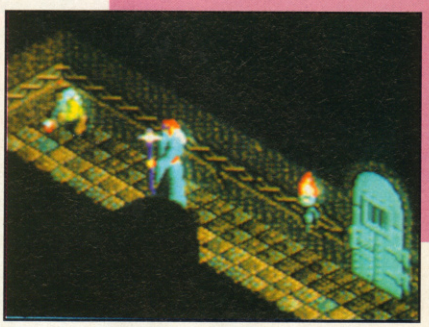
Once landed on an island, be it an open-air village or indoor castle-type situation, the real searching begins. Each of the islands is presented as an isometric maze-like network of roads, caverns and chambers comprising a mix of scrolling areas and single *Cadaver*-style flick-screens. Of the six men on the landed boat, the player can select up to three men to form an 'away team' to do the actual searching - each character comes complete with his or her own RPG-style status, strengths and characteristics, and to this end Heimdall himself needn't always be a member of the landing party - although his strong character makes him a good choice for lead man in most situations.

The path through each island is anything but easy, as the emphasis is set much more on adventure than arcade. To make things simpler, the three-man party is viewed on-screen as a single person who's been selected as the current active character - it's possible to toggle through all three to make use of their particular objects or abilities by means of a more conventional RPG-style status screen. The role-playing elements, though vital, aren't used very regularly during the normal course of exploration, except when a particular team member is called upon to perform an act or use an object that is unique to him (such as opening a door with a key or casting the occasional spell), and for the most part the game calls more on conventional adventuring skills than anything else.

Many of the screens contain some devious trap or puzzle that needs to be solved or negotiated in order to reach the exit, acquire a particular object or whatever. The elaborate and flexible nature of Heimdall's graphics allow for a variety of clever puzzles and effects - switches which must be stepped on in the correct order to unlock an otherwise impassable door, and path-blocking monoliths and sentient enemies that only react to the right type of spell.

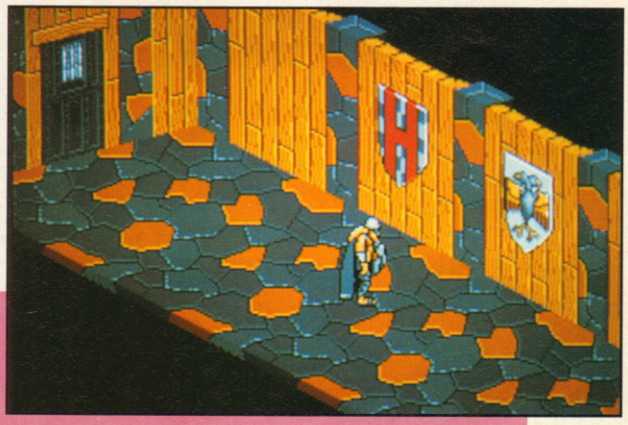
Contact with other characters brings into play more familiar RPG gameplay as such encounters almost invariably lead to a combat sequence. The viewpoint switches to a multi-player icon-driven display similar to that employed by *The Bard's Tale* to allow access to all three characters in the party - simply clicking between them affords the player direct control and access to their abilities. There's a much more arcadey feel to Heimdall's battle scenes than the linear way in which stand-alone RPG games handle combat.

Instead of working through a series of 'rounds' where characters attack in turn with hit points updated accordingly, fighting in Heimdall is more akin ▶ 54



compare & contrast

Electronic Arts' *The Immortal* is generally held to be the top exponent of the isometric adventure genre, and Heimdall is easily as good - if not for quite the same reasons. Though *The Immortal* offers more levels, Heimdall's quests are larger, meaning that there's at least as much for the player to see and do. Heimdall, however, scores extra points in this department due to its non-linear construction, which allows the player to explore at will, rather than passing through a set sequence of events. Although it's a tough point, I'd say that *The Immortal* just pips Heimdall to the graphical post, as though the visuals aren't quite so clearly defined, the remarkable animation gives the game much more character and atmosphere. So there you go, it's all a question of Norses for courses really - although for my dosh, I'd go for *The Immortal* most days of the week.



NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

No, but this is. Take a walk with us, why don't you, through one of Heimdall's smaller islands, to get an idea of some of the puzzles and obstacles that crop up along the way...

With the only way forward blocked by a trio of deadly traps, this mysterious sextet of switches are the only solution. Each switch has a different effect on the pits, closing some but opening others - only by pressing the correct ones in the correct sequence can all three be removed and the exit opened.

No puzzles to solve on this screen - but there's no way past this malevolent ogre without putting up a fight. Watch out too for the pitfall trap on the right and don't forget to inspect the treasure chest.

No physical force will move this mystical stone monolith which blocks the party's progress. Time, perhaps, for one of the more magically-inclined members of the team to chuck a few spells at it and see if that has any effect.

Does this room look like a dead end? Look again. There's a hidden exit here somewhere, but only the cantankerous druid knows where it is. And he'll only reveal it if presented with a sprig of hemlock - which has to be sought out separately. Hey, nobody said it was going to be easy.

Heimdall's character control works on two levels - movement is handled in the standard up-down-left-right fashion, but when there's a complex action to perform, like casting a spell or unlocking a door, the display flicks over to the character screen, where more traditional RPG-style pointing and clicking does the business.

Though some of the smaller islands may look like independent locations, they're more often than not just part of the same archipelago, and lead you to the same location. Learning which is which is an essential time-saving exercise.

Graphic artist Jerr O'Carroll's lavishly-illustrated map of the first quest, included in the game package, is as practical as it is pretty, giving a vague glimpse of what Heimdall is in for on each island.

Make a copy of the game map and cross off islands as they are visited, so as to avoid any pointless accidental return jouneys.

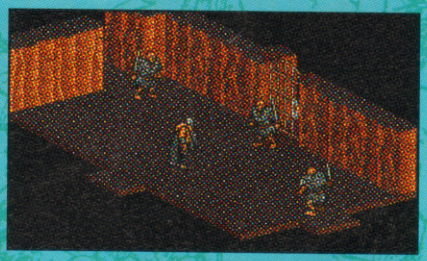
Heimdall can't make long journeys at sea, so it's essential that a route is planned to achieve maximum quest efficiency. Use the islands as stepping stones, where Heimdall's party can stock up on supplies for the next part of the journey.

The whirlpool and sea monster are both no-go areas - keep well away. The whirlpool isn't fatal, but it will wash the ship up on the nearest (and possibly inconvenient) island. It's best not even to talk about what the sea monster's capable of, but it's hardly surprising that it guards one of the area's more important locations.

On islands where the action takes place out in the open air, it's possible to enter houses and other locations to search for clues and treasure. You may have to be prepared for a fight though, as the home-owners don't appreciate trespassers. In this case the effort has been worth it - there's a bag of gold to be collected on the far left, and just above Heimdall there's a scroll, possibly containing a magic spell. Hoorah!

Don't let appearance be deceiving. The size of an island as it appears on the quest map is not always a good representation of its actual size when visited.

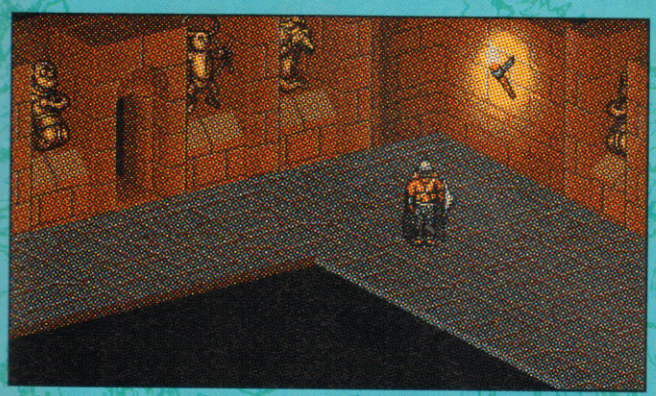
When collecting spells, always allocate them to party members with a high Runelore rating, or they may not be able to cast them.



Guards! Guards! As Heimdall reaches the objective of his quest (in this case Thor's Hammer), things get more and more difficult. In this room, for example, there's no way forward without fighting - and even then the most interesting-looking exit is locked!

When a fight is initiated, the action switches to this RPG-style battle screen. The player can switch between members of the party at will to get the most formidable fighting combinations.
ACE HINT! Attack just when the opponent is about to attack himself - as he pulls back to strike, he drops his guard and becomes vulnerable.

heimdall provides a much more serene experience than most conventional arcade adventures. The emphasis is set more on exploration than extermination, and as such it's the more thoughtful breed of gamers who are likely to appreciate what it has to offer.



Though Heimdall's isometric viewpoint often leads to blank areas of the screen, it's impossible for the character to fall off the landscape - thankfully. That's about the only concession the player gets though, as the floors are riddled with deadly traps, many of which aren't even visible until they've been stepped on - and by then it's too late.

CARRY ON VIKING!

Though the Norweigans aren't exactly the ruckingest people in the world today, back when the Earth was new and people were stupid, they were one of the hardest mobs going. In fact the woolly warriors' exploits became so famous that they've since made their mark in just about every popular culture. The most famous example is Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis prancing about in silly tin helmets in *The Vikings*, which gets churned out by the BBC about once a year. More recently we've had *Erik The Viking*, which made a rather dubious point of casting an American actor (Tim Robbins, complete with accent) in the title role, and a variety of other, rather poor efforts, including an *Incredible Hulk* special in which Lou Ferrigno slugs it out with Thor, God of Thunder! Thor also had his own strip in Marvel comics, which wasn't particularly successful, as well as a supporting role in Douglas Adams' novel *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*. And of course, let's not forget good old *Noggin The Nog*, the sweet little viking who used to brighten up children's television no end. *Little Plum* out of the Beano might also have been quite a good example of a viking comic character, but he was a Red Indian, so there you go. Oh, and there's a wrestler out of the *World Wrestling Federation* called The Berserker who, just like his Nordic ancestors, not only mutilates his opponents but beats *himself* up as well!

Games-wise we've had an *Erik The Viking* adventure (based on Terry Jones' original children's book), a low quality Commodore 64 effort called *The Vikings* (which was blessed, if nothing else, with a very excellent soundtrack) and the classic *Valhalla*, which was heralded as a landmark in computer entertainment when it was releaed on the ZX Spectrum with 'stunning' yellow and black UDG graphics about seven years ago, but was actually a load of old rubbish. If you are interested in Vikings, you can read some books about them. There are probably some down at your local library.

51 ▶ to an outside-the-pub punch-up, with everybody pitching into the bloody free-for-all when and how they see fit. As well as the standard sword and axe swipes, characters can attack with whatever magic spells they have available as well as defend incoming blows and on occasion pray for a helping hand from the Gods themselves.

And though control of the combat is handled at a distance, so to speak, with the player simply handing out orders to his characters via the icons, there is an element of arcade skill - the graphic window portraying the current enemy is fully animated, and the success or failure of an attack move depends on the position of the opponent when it's executed. Lunge when the enemy's shield is raised and the blow will be blocked, but if an attack goes in while the creature is vulnerable (such as when it is about to attack itself), it should hit dead-on and cause maximum damage. Accordingly, the defend option should be selected in synchronisation with the enemy's attacks. If energy is low, or the odds look a bit dodgy, the party can flee to avoid any unpleasantries, but doing so forfeits the chance of getting any objects of interest an enemy may be guarding - if it's a doorway to a later part of the level, fighting may be the only way to progress.

Interaction with 'friendly' characters is possible, if a little limited. Sometimes Heimdall's party will meet with villagers or cackling dungeon-dwellers who may offer clues, advice or items of interest when questioned. In larger villages, shops provide a place to exchange gold for provisions and weaponry. Other characters, while not exactly hostile to the point of violence, can be a major pain, often blocking the way forward and refusing to budge until they've been given a particular item - which may need to be sought out independently on a completely different island, opening up yet another challenge.

Such fiendish goings-on are Heimdall's trademark, with traps and tests scattered around in unnerving abundance. Like *Cadaver*, *The Immortal* and the classic Ultimate games, such as *Knight Lore* which inspired the whole isometric adventure genre in the first place, Heimdall calls on a wide range of the player's resources. Skill and judgement are required to suss out the variety of pitfalls and make most efficient use of the wide-ranging spells and objects to be found in the many treasure chests. An eye for strategy wouldn't go amiss either - not the *Chess/Populous* kind, but at least an organised plan of how the islands are to be tackled.

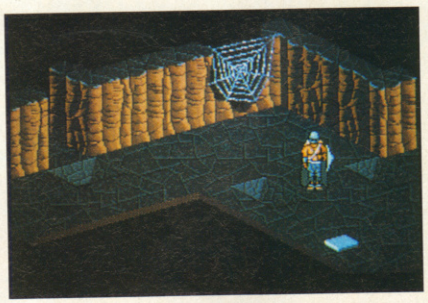
The most important quality, however, is patience. Heimdall's a giant game, and the multitude of puzzles combined with the way in which the quests have been designed across the islands ensures that real thought and effort is required if anything is to be gotten out of the game. It's a very thorough game, which scores highly over similar product like *Cadaver* as while it's involving, it doesn't get overly complicated or stray too far into the RPG side of things. At heart it's just a very enjoyable arcade adventure with some pleasing extra layers that serve to involve the player more and draw him deeper into the game.

Heimdall, however, is by no means perfect, although the problems are less to do with what's wrong with the game's existing elements and more to do with what's missing. The trio of preliminary 'trial' sequences are a lot of fun and work well where they are, but more could have been made of the idea of having arcade interludes, perhaps by scattering similar sub-sections around within the main game. If nothing else, they would provide the player with some light relief from his heavy-duty quest every now and again.

(Left) Occasionally Heimdall's trek takes him out of the dank tunnels and caverns of the underworld and through some beautifully rendered villages. Some of the houses are shops where our hero can purchase anything from a bread roll to a throwing axe with the treasure collected on his travels. In some places, however, the welcome isn't so warm (see below), and Heimdall must test his combat skills to proceed.

Amiga version

Expertly defined and coloured characters and backdrops paint a very pretty picture indeed, and the classy music helps to pile on the atmosphere. But beware! There's a price for all this technical wizardry, and it's a 1Mb machine, preferably with an external drive as Heimdall comes on a whopping FOUR disks. For those who've got the technical muscle to run it though, Heimdall packs a hefty punch.



Heimdall does a fine job of blending together elements of role-playing, strategy, arcade and adventure into a single well-formed and playable game.

Heimdall's quests entail him facing constant puzzles and challenges almost every step of the way, many involving the proper use of spells found in his travels. Here, for example, Heimdall has to find some way across the gorge so that he can continue his exploration, but how can he bridge that gap? The answer isn't a Cadbury's Snack, that's for sure. Looks like it's time to use that Bridge Spell discovered earlier.

THE TRIALS OF LIFE

Before the quest can begin, Heimdall must try his hand at three arcade-style trials. Although these games are simplistic one-offs (and perhaps a little at odds with the nature of the rest of the game), the player shouldn't be fooled into thinking that success in them is a trivial matter. If Heimdall performs poorly then the possible candidates that he can choose between to join him on his quest is seriously reduced from the maximum of thirty. And not being able to choose a powerful cleric or tough berserker may have serious consequences later on. The RPG purist will be relieved to hear that they can skip these seqeunces, at the serious penalty of having the crew shortlist cut down to fifteen.

The First Trial

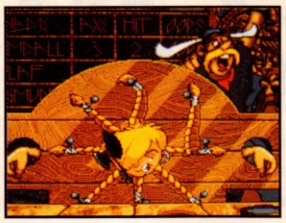
In the local tavern a beer-soaked Heimdall must try to free a young girl from the stocks by lobbing large axes at the eight tethered braids holding her trapped. The player guides Heimdall's aim with the joystick, but a serious case of the DTs and even more serious limit on the number of axes makes this a much harder task that it sounds.

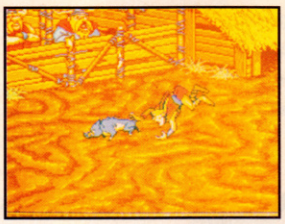
The Second Trial

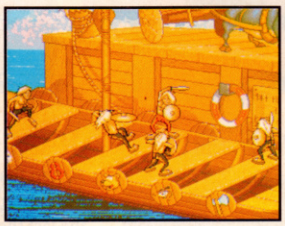
In a muddy field Heimdall must chase and try to catch a greased warthog. The player guides his on-screen Heimdall alter-ego as he runs about, and well-timed use of the FIRE button is required to make Heimdall successfully leap onto the pig.

The Third Trial

Heimdall, rapidly approaching maturity, has to face off against a legion of berserkers on board a rocking longboat. While trying to 'encourage' his foes into the water, Heimdall also has to avoid coming a cropper by falling overboard himself.







(Above top, middle and bottom) The Three Trials of Heimdall.

(Above right) Heimdall approaches the end of his first quest with discovery of Thor's Hammer. But how in Asgard's name is he ever going to get it home? Time to see a shrink, perhaps...

(Below) This is the pits! Yet another problem for Heimdall. There's a chest in the corner surrounded by bottomless chasms. It's bound to contain something vital, but how to reach it?

Though the RPG-style battle sequences are more arcade-style than most, because they rely on hand-eye coordination as well as good decision making, they're not different enough to make them really interesting. The same role-playing characteristics could have been applied with equal effect to a side-on beat-'em-up type affair, for instance, where more is made of the arcade aspect. As they are they quickly become more a matter of routine than anything else.

Another very chewy bone of contention is Heimdall's graphic presentation. One look at the screenshots should leave you with little doubt that they're technically excellent - as would be expected from an ex-Don Bluth animator - but there are doubts as to how suitable these cartoony *Asterix*-style visuals are to a game and subject matter as hefty as Heimdall's. Their simplistic style somehow belies the serious nature of the game itself, and doesn't go too well with the mighty blood-and-thunder vision that most of us have when we hear the word Viking.

It's possible to push this point further and say that the whole game represents somewhat of a wasted opportunity in terms of how it uses the Viking theme as a basis for its scenario - it's an idea we've not seen used since the ancient *Valhalla*, and though it's very interesting and got bags of potential, the large part of it has not been realised here. A bit of village-burning, murder and pillage, perhaps in those aforementioned arcade sub-sections, would have done a lot to make better use of the neglected subject matter.

Ultimately though, Heimdall does a fine job of blending together elements of role-playing, strategy, arcade and adventure into a single well-formed and playable game. The various gameplay styles interact well without stepping on each other's toes and the result is enough to earn it an unreserved recommendation, if not quite the ultimate accolade of an ACE Trailblazer. Despite its minor flaws, Heimdall offers enough to earn it a joint ranking with *The Immortal* as the most impressive example of isometric adventuring yet, and fans of the genre should be chuffed accordingly.

● **Gary Whitta**

HEIMDALL RATINGS

RATINGS

Well-executed mix of game-play styles.

Very pretty visuals.

Long-lasting quests.

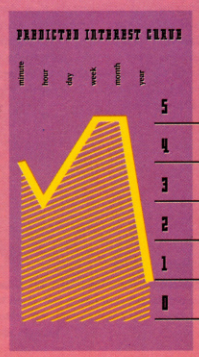
More could have been made of Viking scenario potential.

1Mb only - plus a fair amount of disk-swapping

895 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	7	8	8

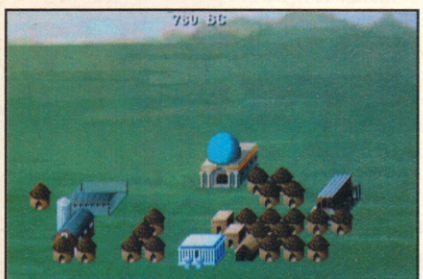
The pre-game action sequences provide a lot of fun and get the player hyped-up for what's to come - they're the computerised equivalent of a TV studio's warm-up man. From then on, however, the player needs to buckle down for the serious quest in hand, and it may take a while to get a firm foothold on the action. There may be a frustrating period of wandering around aimlessly before the first few encounters or puzzles are out of the way and things can get going. There's enough tough stuff to keep the player involved for a long time, although the scope of the quest may prove to be a bit too much for less patient gamers.



Genre Strategy
Publisher Microprose
Developer Sid Meier
Price £39.99

CIVILIZATION

Just how much is it possible to squeeze to into one game? It's a question that American games design guru Sid Meier seems to be increasingly fond of. The veteran programmer's products just keep on getting bigger and bigger. And bigger. From the claustrophobic military



Though Civilization is played mostly from the map and city management screens, there are a few extra visuals which help provide the player with an extra sense of achievement. Here, for example, a selected city is displayed in all its VGA glory. Naturally the picture changes as the city expands, starting from a few mud huts and growing as city improvements such as libraries, army barracks, palaces, temples and protective walls are added. As the game reaches present day, and providing the player has been doing his job properly, the city becomes a sprawling metropolis. Now that's what I call progress!

simulations F-15 Strike Eagle and Silent Service to the excesses of the excellent - and very elaborate - Railway Tycoon, Sid's been getting more and more ambitious of late.

With his latest project, however, some might argue that he may have got a bit carried away with himself, as he's not so much pushed the strategy envelope as driven over it with an articulated lorry. Yes, Civilization is a game to which the word BIG could only really start to apply if it was written in hundred-foot high flashing neon capital letters and attached to the top of the World Trade Centre. Quite how deep the game is isn't easy to summarise, but suffice to say that during the process of the review, I'd say that we only scratched the surface of what it has to offer. Civilization is the sort of game that is possible to play in a regular carefree manner, but only really pays off when the player invests the level of time, care and patience that its almost unfathomable level of strategy requires.

Civilization's objectives are deceptively simple, putting the player in charge of a tiny tribe of primitive people way back in the early BCs and charging him to guide them through the ages, expanding, learning and developing along the way and ultimately creating a modern-day worldwide empire. But of course it's not even remotely as easy as it sounds, because as the bulky manual is keen to point out, creating a civilisation is one thing - creating a civilisation that lasts is quite another. History's a great teacher, and if there's one thing it's taught us over the last thousand years or so, it only takes one cock-up to bring even the mightiest empire to its knees.

Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Genghis Khan all learned the hard way, and building a survivable empire without the same fall pitfalls is the challenge presented by Civilization. Though only persistent players are likely to get anywhere, it only takes a cursory look around the game to get an idea of its amazing depth and scope. War, medicine, industrialisation, cities, taxation, population control, civil unrest, trade, science, travel, agriculture and the environment are all factors to understand and master if a tribe is to achieve a proper civilised existence. As is often the case with these more elaborate and sprawling strategy epics, winning and losing are both rather ambiguous concepts, although anybody who manages to wipe out every rival civilisation on the planet or become advanced enough to send ships into space can safely retire with a smug grin on their face. Needless to say, neither is particularly easy.

Civilization presents itself in much the same way as Meier's Railroad Tycoon - so much so that at first glance it could be mistaken for the same game. Here, though, things aren't restricted just to the United States - this operation is on a planetary scale, staged

either on a carbon copy of Earth or a fictional player-customised world.

Things begin in the year 3000 BC with a single group of rambling settlers who form the basis of the player's civilisation. As would be expected, things are pretty primitive in these formative years, and Meier has gone to lengths to make things as realistic as possible - most of the screen is in darkness at the outset, indicating unexplored territory, and new areas are only "coloured in" as the player's units walk over them.

The initial priority is the formation of a base city from which to run the whole operation. Without cities there can be no civilisation, so finding an appropriate spot for the initial settlement is of paramount importance. Once a base camp has been set and named, the real work begins. As nature takes its course, the city grows in size and more units can be sent out to explore the surrounding territory. Units move in turns, travelling squares at a time depending on their type and the terrain, and as such the central map is uncovered, piece by piece.

Settlers prove to be one of the most useful unit types, as they move out to found and maintain new cities, thereby expanding the empire, while diplomats help to forge links between civilisations, acting as an ambassador - or even a spy or saboteur, if the player is of more devious inclination. Further, and more useful ties can be made by establishing trade routes between cities by means of caravans, which ferry goods and materials from city to city.

Perhaps the most important units, however, are the military. As disputes between opposing civilisations can easily lead to war, a strong defence force must be maintained to protect the player's city from attack - and of course army units can be sent out to conquer rival territory and cities. As war plays such a large part in the game, it's understandably one of the more elaborate aspects - there's a huge variety of weaponry available, from basic infantry units to knights, artillery and - as the technology becomes available - aircraft, battleships and nuclear bombs.

War is not always the answer, and the key to survival is to know how to deal with opposing civilisations. Peace is not always easy to achieve, and while it may be fun to terrorise and destroy smaller empires, strong diplomatic skills are often required to keep the forces of larger, more powerful civilisations with the same ideas at bay. Peace treaties can be signed, and technology and information traded in order to keep relationships settled - not always easy, given the antagonistic and downright megalomanic attitude of some civilisations.

Though all this may make Civilization sound like a very elaborate war game, that's not really what it's about at all. The concepts of war, peace and relationships with other empires are important to the game, but the real goal is the technological and cultural advancement of the player's own civilisation.

How a people advances from savagery to space-age is a complicated one, but Civilization handles it ▶60

elements are to be found in Civilization, especially those pertaining to the laying of roads and, yes, railroads. But in Civilization, of course, there's a whole lot more to think about, what with environmental, military, civil and trade considerations, than just getting from A to B and making a few quid in the process. It's This wealth of extra factors that makes Civilization an altogether more thoughtful and interesting experience. So say hello to the new ACE Strategy Benchmark.

Finding a suitable candidate for comparison to Civilization is a little bit like trying to buy a present for the man who has everything. It's a bit like Sim City, but then again it's a bit like Sim Earth as well. And it's a bit like lots of other things too. The most suitable candidate, however, has to be Meier's previous effort Railroad Tycoon. Although initially the similarities seem purely superficial (to the untrained eye it looks almost indistinguishable graphically), many of Tycoon's strategic

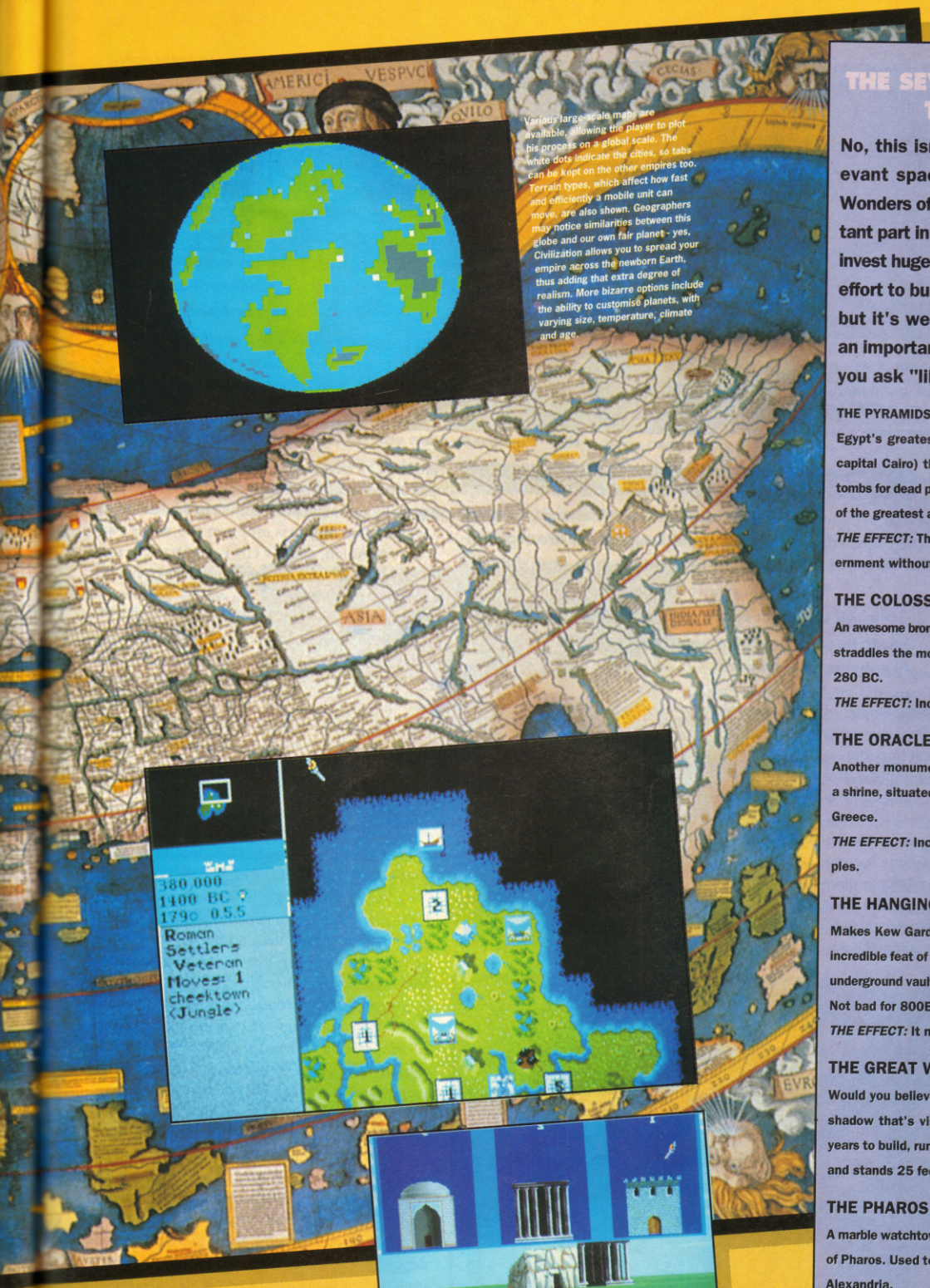
With Civilization, some may argue that Sid Meier may have got a bit carried away with himself, as he's not so much pushed the strategy envelope as driven over it with an articulated lorry.

It's only 1460 BC and already the player's Roman empire is coming along a treat. Four cities have been created, one of which has grown to considerable size (as indicated by the single-figure number which appears over the city icon), and there are two groups of settlers out looking for spots to found new towns. What's more, construction of a road is well underway and a Trireme (a primitve boat) is about to set sail for foreign lands. Hurrah!

(Left and Above) The Civilopedia (or at least one page of it) in all its glory gives some idea of just how deep a game Civilization is. Every entry is an important gameplay element, and some make interesting reading, like the one below, providing historical background information on the game's more important elements - in this case the advent of navigation.

What makes Civilization most interesting is that the player doesn't have to follow a linear plan - instead he's given room to create challenges for himself.

(Above) Once a civilisation has mastered the art of navigation, more advanced boats can be built and set sail across the ocean to seek out new worlds. Notice how only the area traversed by the boat is filled in - the black areas are unexplored and therefore uncovered.
(Left) From time to time, progress screens interrupt the action to tell the player how well he's doing in a particular respect. This is one of the most pleasing, appearing whenever your popularity as a leader exceeds that of a rival emperor. In this case, it seems you're more important than Dan Quayle (but then who isn't?)



Various large-scale maps are available, allowing the player to plot his process on a global scale. The white dots indicate the cities, so tabs can be kept on the other empires too. Terrain types, which affect how fast and efficiently a mobile unit can move, are also shown. Geographers may notice similarities between this globe and our own fair planet - yes, Civilization allows you to spread your empire across the newborn Earth, thus adding that extra degree of realism. More bizarre options include the ability to customise planets, with varying size, temperature, climate and age.

(Above) Sometimes, a fledgling civilisation is unfortunate enough to be "born" on only a small island - as has happened here. An empire's potential power is directly proportional to the size of the land mass it's based on, so all effort has been ploughed into discovering map-making so that a primitive boat, a Trireme, can set sail in search of a new home. Unfortunately, the boat's unlikely to get very far as, without navigational skills, any boat that ventures more than one map square away from shore will automatically be lost at sea.

(Above) If you're doing particularly well and keeping the subjects happy, they may feel compelled to do some renovation work on your house, a splendid palace located wthin the city. For sheer graphicaly effect you get to choose what kind of extension you'd like to have bolted on, so you can keep an eye on the aesthetic look of your palace as it grows. If times get hard, however, you may be forced to sell the old homestead off to a rival civilisation in order to acquire urgent funds. The bigger the place, the more it's worth - and the more heart-breaking it is to see it go...

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

No, this isn't a cynical and barely-relevant space-filler. In fact the Seven Wonders of the World play a very important part in Civilization. An empire must invest huge amounts of time, money and effort to build these mighty landmarks, but it's well worth it as each one has an important positive effect. Did I hear you ask "like what?"...

THE PYRAMIDS

Egypt's greatest splendour, sited in Gaza (near the capital Cairo) the great pyramids were built as giant tombs for dead pharoahs. Today they're regarded as one of the greatest architectural achievements of all time.

THE EFFECT: The emperor may change his form of government without opposition.

THE COLOSSUS

An awesome bronze statue of the Greek God Apollo, which straddles the mouth of the harbour at Rhodes. Built in 280 BC.

THE EFFECT: Increases trade.

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

Another monument to Apollo, this time in the form of a shrine, situated on the slopes of Mount Parnassus in Greece.

THE EFFECT: Increases the religious influence of temples.

THE HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON

Makes Kew Gardens look like a window box. Another incredible feat of engineering, reputedly including giant underground vaults which housed hydraulic lifting gear. Not bad for 800BC.

THE EFFECT: It makes the people happy!

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Would you believe that the wall is so huge, it casts a shadow that's visible from the moon?! It took 1800 years to build, runs for 2150 miles, is twelve feet thick and stands 25 feet high.

THE PHAROS OF ALEXANDRIA

A marble watchtower and lighthouse, built on the island of Pharos. Used to aid ships into the nearby harbour of Alexandria.

THE EFFECT: Increases shipping efficiency.

THE GREAT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

Forget the local seat of learning - this giant bookhouse held an incredible 700,000 volumes!

THE EFFECT: Increases the rate of technological advancement.

with aplomb. Within each civilisation is a group of wise men, responsible for researching and discovering new theories and inventions. Initially only a few basic avenues of research are available - the alphabet, the wheel, pottery and other rudimentary skills. But once these are discovered, the newfound knowledge allows the researchers to look into more advanced matters. As more skills and information are acquired, so the people become better equipped to take on even more sophisticated research and projects.

57 ▶

For example, one of the biggest steps a civilisation can take is to travel across the sea to discover and populate new continents. But boats can't be built until navigation and map-making skills are acquired - and those can't be learned until knowledge of astronomy and the alphabet is available.

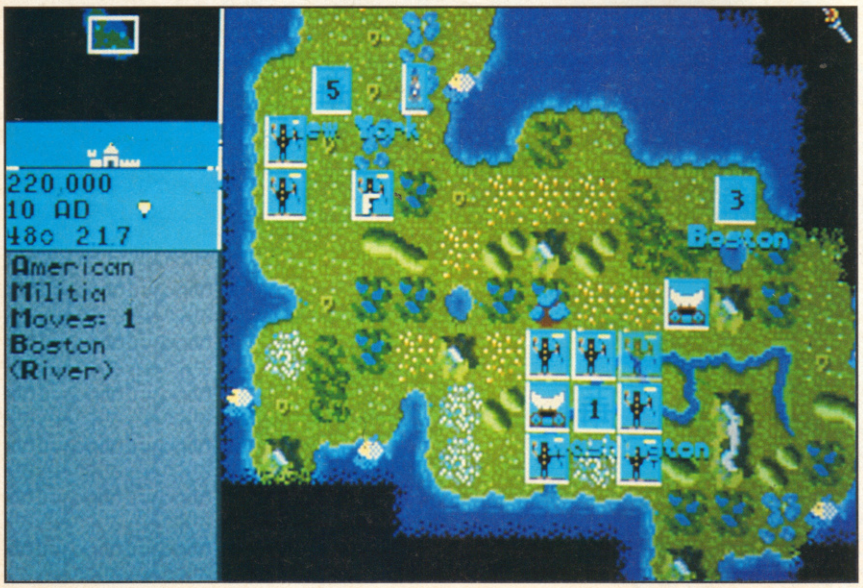
All knowledge and advancements, from basic philosophy, religion and democratic principles right up to space flight and nuclear power, is learned in this step-by-step fashion. A giant in-game reference manual, the Civilopedia, contains comprehensive data on just about everything it's possible for the player to research or build, and the player can use this information to direct his people's growth. By system of government and rule, the player can create an aggressive, warlike nation or a peaceful empire of explorers. Whatever the player's outlook, however, technological growth is of paramount importance, if only in order to keep up with the Joneses and ensure the empire doesn't fall foul of other civilisations.

As a civilisation's technology progresses, the factors and equations that govern the game become more and more complex - industrialised cities require much more thoughtful housekeeping if they are to function efficiently, and there are even environmental considerations, as factories, traffic and nuclear power all have negative, polluting effects on the planet that need to be controlled. Further caretaking skills are required to keep the populace happy - it's said that society is only ever two meals away from revolution, and if a city is neglected or mismanaged, civil disorder inevitably follows and the town collapses.

Click on a city and the player is presented with a status screen, showing population size, food stocks, projects in development, defensive capabilities and the all-important "happy factor" - what proportion of the population is happy, content or unhappy. All major decisions pertaining to city management are made from here and it's vital they're made well - if the town drifts into delinquency, it stops building, food production and the people won't even pay their taxes! Intolerable.

PC Version

For the most part, Civilization looks nothing special, although there are occasional graphic interludes which give the eyes something more interesting to do for a short while. All the major sound cards are supported, though it has to be said that the sonic side of things doesn't exactly enhance the strategy.



Another empire well on its way to success. Three cities have been built, and military units on the prowl to ensure that they're safe from any marauding barbarian forces. Further investigation of this landscape will reveal it to be only a small landscape,.making boats a necessity for further exploration.

Though winning and losing are pretty subjective concepts in Civilization (the program lets play continue even after the game has been officially won if the player desires), constant - and very strict - scores and tallies are kept along the way to give an idea of how well the respective empires are faring. As well as an overall Civilisation Score, tables and graphs appear on a regular basis, showing the most powerful and successful empires. It's purely a numerical reference however, as Civilization doesn't encourage the player to be tied to scores and objectives, preferring instead to allow him to go off on any favourable tangent and explore the possibilities. It's a very free-range game, but as a world model it's realistic enough to penalise players who are a little too cosmic with their thinking.

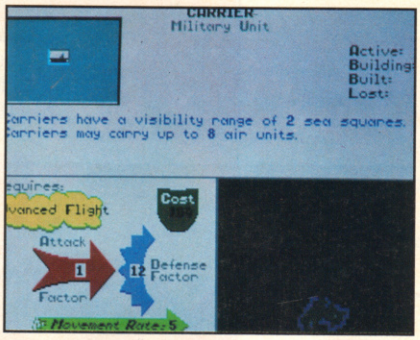
Civilization's not an easy game to categorise, if only because of its sheer size. It won't fit into any one pigeonhole, no matter how hard it's pushed. The variety and scope of its gameplay means it encompasses a number of genres - at heart it's a strategy game, like playing Sim City on a global scale, but it works equally well as a planetary and sociological simulation. On yet another, more simplistic level it's an absorbing war game.

It's only when all these come together during play and Civilization is viewed as a whole that its real beauty becomes apparent. A flick through the hefty manual is a frightening experience, and rightly so, as Civilization is probably the most involved and depthy strategy game ever devised. That aspect in itself is likely to put a lot of people off - this certainly isn't a product for lightweights or people who like to dip in and out of a game.

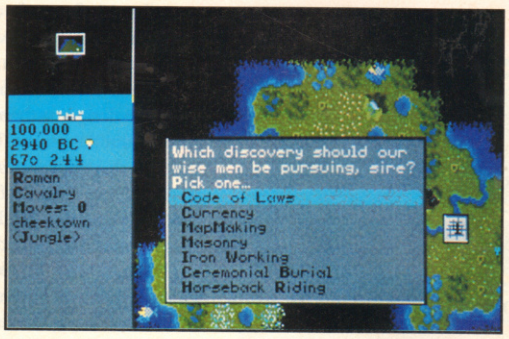
The rewards are only there for those willing to commit themselves, but it's well worth the effort. Though Civilization looks bland, being devoid of the graphical trickeries that are fast becoming synonymous with PC product, it's been exquisitely presented. The game provides constant help and tactical tips via pop-up windows, and everything is clean

I DID IT MEIER WAY

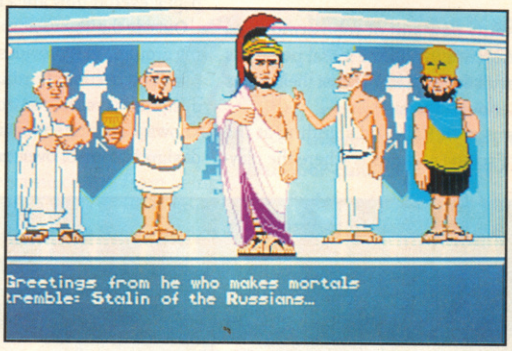
Yes, he certainly did. There can be little doubt that Sid Meier, Microprose's senior games designer and the grey matter behind Civilization is a bit of a top boy. He may look about as interesting as John Major in one of his less exciting moods, but when he's dead he'll probably be hailed as the Mozart of computer games. Or maybe not. Whatever, Sid remains one of the most influential creative voices in the games industry today - not only was he the co-founder of Microprose, but he went on to knock up some of their best-known titles - Hellcat Ace, F-15 Strike Eagle, Silent Service and the superb Railroad Tycoon to name but four. With two million of his games sold worldwide, Sid knows what he's talking about. "People can go to movies for graphics and books for storylines," he says. "They look to computers for interaction and stories in which they themselves are the main character." Quite right too! Rumours that an all-star four-part mini series about Sid's life entitled *Meier - Man of Software* starring Kevin Costner in the title role are unfounded at time of writing. Watch this space.



The exhaustive Civilopedia provides information on every subject imaginable - not just technological discoveries, but city improvements, civilisation advances, terrain types and, as in this case, military units. Information available includes the technology required to build a certain unit or piece of hardware, the cost, running speed and effectiveness in both offensive and defensive modes. As shown here, aircraft carriers are particularly hard as they can ferry up to 8 air-attack units across the sea to strike on faraway targets. Excellent!



Every tribe has a group of Tefal-headed wise men who are constantly chewing their pencils as they work night and day to make that next all-important technological breakthrough. When a discovery is made, the clever bods can be immediately re-assigned to working on any of the other available projects. It's a constantly advancing process, with new potential discoveries becoming available as more knowledge is acquired. The Civilopedia is at its most valuable here, telling what skills should be learned in order to reach a specific goal.



Every now and again, a boastful leader of a rival civilisation may make a public announcement, showing off a new piece of technology that his empire has discovered. Such trading of knowledge also plays a vital part in peace negotiations, when pieces of technology are used as valuable bargaining chips to placate threatening, aggressive nations. But always remember the old paradoxical adage - if you want peace, you must prepare for way. You'd better believe it.

and uncluttered. It works well, allowing the gameplay to operate unrestricted without swamping the player with unwanted information. The best strategy games are always the ones that look a lot simpler than they really are, and Civilization is a shining example.

But although the game does much to make itself as accessible as possible, it's still arguable whether there's too much substance for its own good. There's only so much the human mind can juggle at a time, and sometimes the player gets the impression that Civilization's layer upon layer of mathematical and strategic formula is simply too much for the average to handle.

In practice, however, it's a concern that's only like to be relevant for novice strategists, and those who got their rocks off on the likes of Sim City and Railroad Tycoon should relish the opportunity to have a bit more piled onto their plate. It's certainly a challenging experience, and due to the nature of the game, one that will become more and more compulsive as time goes on and the player's civilisation grows.

What makes the game most interesting is that the player doesn't have to follow a linear plan - instead he's given room to create challenges for himself and pursue them - be it the discovery of nuclear power, the lead in the space race or all-out military supremacy. The feeling of megolamania is overwhelming, as there are no strict guidelines to stick to. After all, how can you feel like a global overlord if the game keeps telling you what you can or can't do?

Ultimately, what Civilization represents is a sizeable step forward for the strategy genre, by showing just how much is possible with a game of this type.

Ultimately, what Civilization represents is a sizeable step forward for the strategy genre, by showing just how much is possible with a game of this type. It's huge, compelling, compulsive, intriguing and - most importantly - very, very enjoyable. It's also Meier's masterpiece to date - what he'll come up with next doesn't even bear thinking about.

● Gary Whitta

ACE TRAILBLAZER

RATINGS

Phenomenal depth and scope.

Easily accessible.

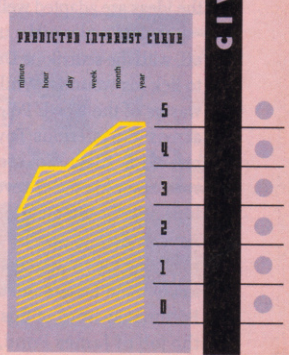
Agreeable open-plan gameplay.

Is it TOO big?

930 PC RATING

G 7 IQ 9 A 6 FF 9

It takes a lot of time, effort and patience to get into Civilization - but it's worth it. The start of the game is arguable the hardest part, as getting a good early foothold is no easy task. The limited options available at the outset translate into limited enjoyment, but as the player progresses and more aspects come into play, the experience becomes more and more involving. Civilization's open-ended design, coupled with its sheer depth and scope mean that there's unlikely to be any lapse in enjoyment for players who are willing and able to keep up with what's going on. The facility to play on different worlds, with customised atmospheres and terrains provides additional challenge. The game's longevity is pretty much unquestionable - it's one that's guaranteed to eat up every minute of available spare time well into the new year and beyond. Buy it and get lost (in the game, that is).



CIVILIZATION RATINGS

Genre Platform
Publisher Millennium
Developer In-house
Price £25.99

ROBOCOD

It's been a bit of a lean time recently for console-less platform game fans. With the likes of *Mario IV* on the Super Famicom and *Sonic* on the Megadrive grabbing both the headlines and the plaudits, there's been little for the computer owner to do but look on with envious eyes.

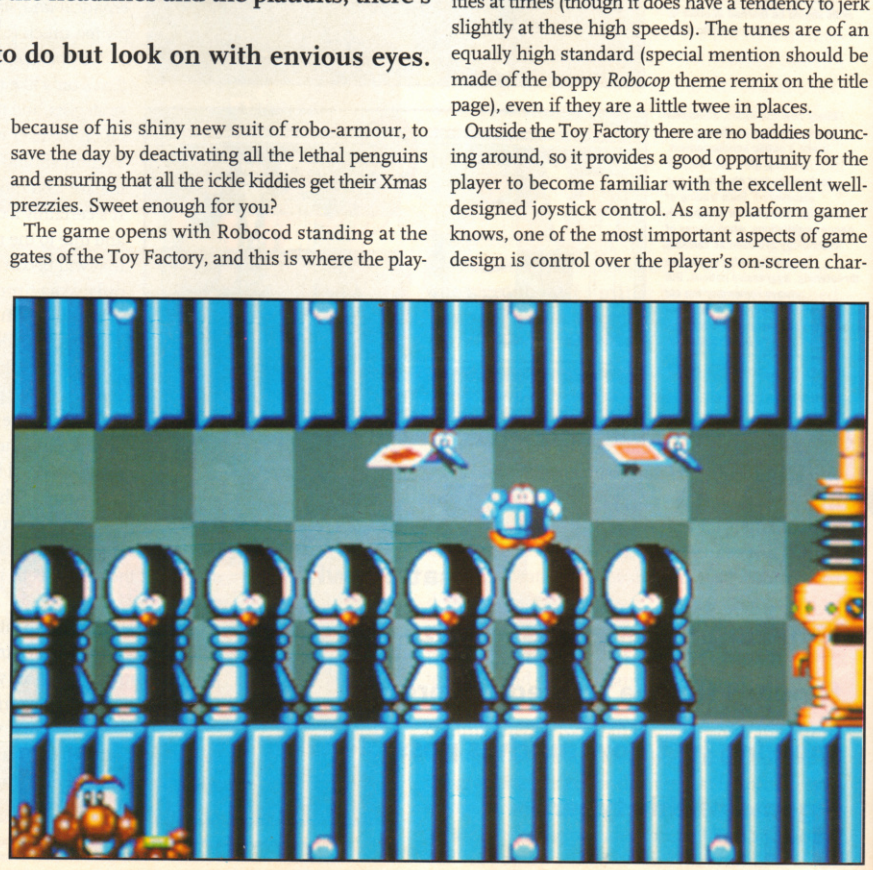
Well, now there's a new platform game hero in town - and this time he's on the Amiga.

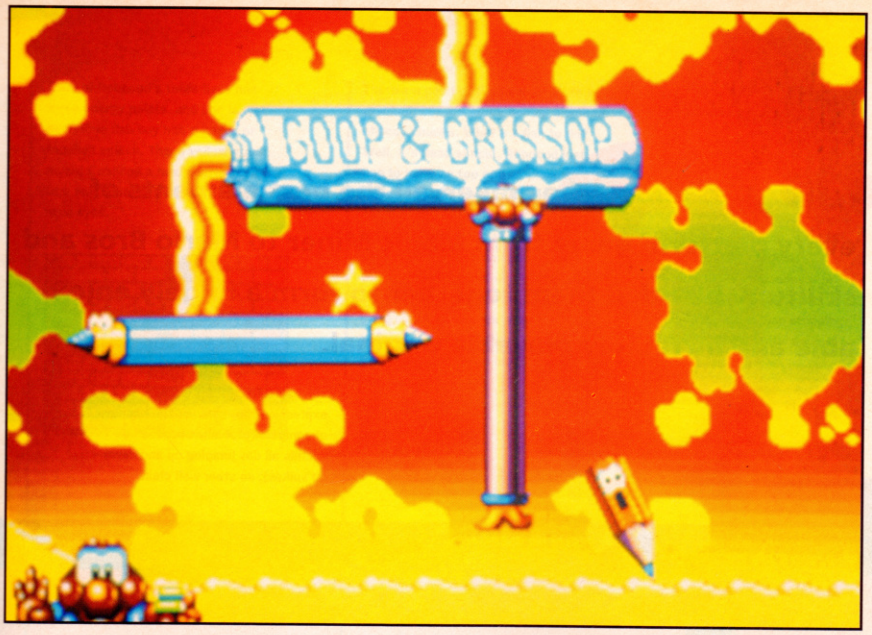
To say that Robocod is a *Mario* clone is something of an understatement. It's akin to saying that Coke tastes like Pepsi - they share so many similar ingredients that they're bound to be alike. In designing this sequel to the polished but flawed *James Pond*, Millenium has taken ideas from *Mario* and - to a lesser extent - *Sonic* and 'interpreted' them (i.e. changed them enough to avoid solicitor-style encounters) for inclusion into Robocod. Which, it should be stressed, is not that a serious criticism. After all, there are only so many game ideas knocking around and if you're going to borrow from anything you might as well borrow from the best. And as long as the ideas are adapted well, who's really to complain?

Robocod's plot picks up where *James Pond*'s left off, with the scurrilous Dr Maybe fleeing northwards to lick his wounds. While trekking through the icy wastes of the North Pole the bad Doctor stumbles across a mysterious Toy Factory, the proprietor a one Mr S. Claus. So, seeing the perfect opportunity to exact his bitter revenge on the world, Maybe hides exploding penguins in the various toy warehouses. And, to prevent anyone tampering with his nasty deposits, Maybe hot-wires the factory's mechanical toys and turns them into lethal robotic guardians. Fortunately word of this foul plot leaks out and it's the job of James Pond, now known as Robocod because of his shiny new suit of robo-armour, to save the day by deactivating all the lethal penguins and ensuring that all the ickle kiddies get their Xmas prezzies. Sweet enough for you?

The game opens with Robocod standing at the gates of the Toy Factory, and this is where the player catches his first sight of the marvellous graphics. The cutesy sprites and lavish backdrops are all drawn and coloured well and are full of life and humour, and the obvious care and attention to detail that's gone into designing them remains consistently high throughout the game. The parallaxed backgrounds are superb, with fine use made of colour banding to give an impression of depth. The smooth multi-way scroll is amazing and almost reaches Sonic velocities at times (though it does have a tendency to jerk slightly at these high speeds). The tunes are of an equally high standard (special mention should be made of the boppy *Robocop* theme remix on the title page), even if they are a little twee in places.

Outside the Toy Factory there are no baddies bouncing around, so it provides a good opportunity for the player to become familiar with the excellent well-designed joystick control. As any platform gamer knows, one of the most important aspects of game design is control over the player's on-screen char-





To say that Robocod is a *Mario* clone is something of an understatement. It's akin to saying that new Coke tastes like Pepsi - they share so many similar ingredients that they're bound to be alike.

acter. It's all very well having 'mega' graphics and 'fab' sound, but if the controls are slow or clumsy then the game will probably be consigned to the dusty top shelf even before the disc drive has stopped whirring. A recent culprit of this is a certain game by a popular set of 'Brothers'. I think you know who I'm talking about.

Fortunately, there are no such problems here. Robocod's programmers have obviously spent a lot of time looking at the game control in other platform games and have implemented the best ideas here. As a result Robocod can be made to perform a variety of moves from a single joystick without control ever becoming clumsy or uninstinctive.

For example, in mid-jump the full-metal-jacketed fish can be made to twist and turn, allowing the player to engage in lots of precarious platform-perching antics. Like *Mario*, half of the enjoyment of the game comes from being able to weave Robocod in and out of a variety of obstacles and still end up with one fin on a tiny little ledge, thus drawing suitably awed gasps of admiration from any friends who happen to be watching at the time. Another *Mario* steal is Robocod's baddy-bashin' butt. By jumping on top of the nasties Robocod can give them a hefty whack, although it may well take more than one clonk to send them to toy heaven.

A novel idea, and one of the cleverest, is Robocod's crouch. When Robocod's standing on a platform he retracts his all-too-vulnerable fins inside his robo-armour and hunches down, ducking him out of the way of flying baddies or bullets. Nothing too surprising there. But the really clever thing is that the screen scrolls down too, allowing the player to get a preview of any dangers lurking below.

In addition, when Robocod's in free-fall the crouch turns the fishy one into a living battering ram, knocking seven bells out of anything he hits. Not only is it a good way of seeing off the baddies (it's far more powerful than the standard slap on the head), it also makes Robocod pretty much invulnerable. Thus there are never any situations where Robocod has to unnecessarily risk life and fin by jumping into dangerous-looking voids - the player can always get an idea of the dangers below and act accordingly.

Just as handy is Robocod's super-stretchy stomach. Hitting FIRE makes Robocod's top-half extend skywards until it hits something solid, whereupon Robocod clings on for dear life and his bottom-half snaps up to join him. Robocod can then monkey-swing along the underside of the platform until he finds a nice safe place to drop off onto. Exploratory use of this ability is also useful for spying out where secret rooms and bonuses are hidden. Being super

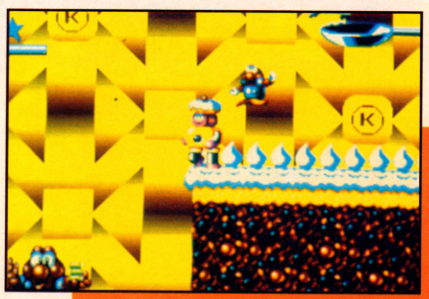
▶ 66

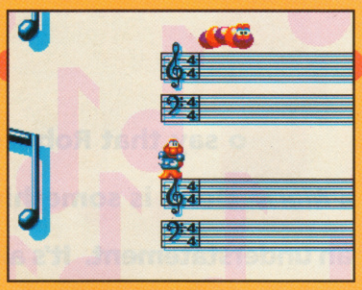
Compare & contrast

Hmmmm, *Mario IV* and Robocod. Well, there's certainly plenty to compare. As mentioned in the main review, Robocod shares many similarities to Nintendo's plumber-cum-hero (and it's unlikely that this is down to chance), both in the fluidity of control over the main character and the sheer range of opponents and game tasks. Indeed, Robocod comes very close to achieving *Mario*'s benchmark status, but a few things keep it from such lofty greatness.

***Mario*'s multi-layered parallax, clearer graphics and amazing sound effects, for one, put it a notch above Robocod, but these are partly due to the relative qualities of the host machines rather than any intrinsic design faults so it's a little unfair to carp on about these differences. What really sets *Mario* apart is it's sheer longevity. It's a far larger game than Robocod (which is saying something), with far more to discover, and this size is backed up by a clever SAVE facility. Some may argue that this is inevitable given the huge memory reserves of cartridges, but unlike the graphics and sound this advantage does have a significant effect on the gameplay.**

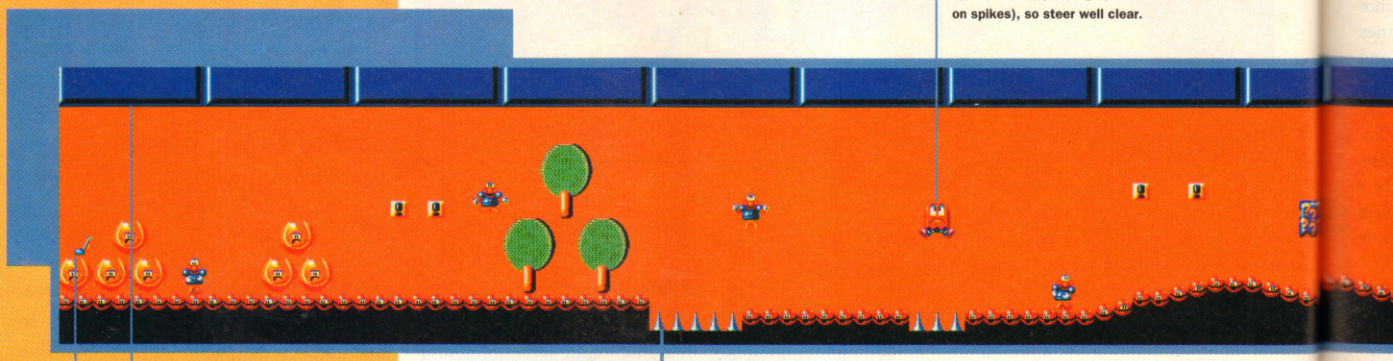
But to put this criticism into perspective, Robocod is the nearest to a truly *Mario*-style game yet seen on the computer systems, and has enough original features to make it much more than uninspired clone and an essential buy for any platform game fan.





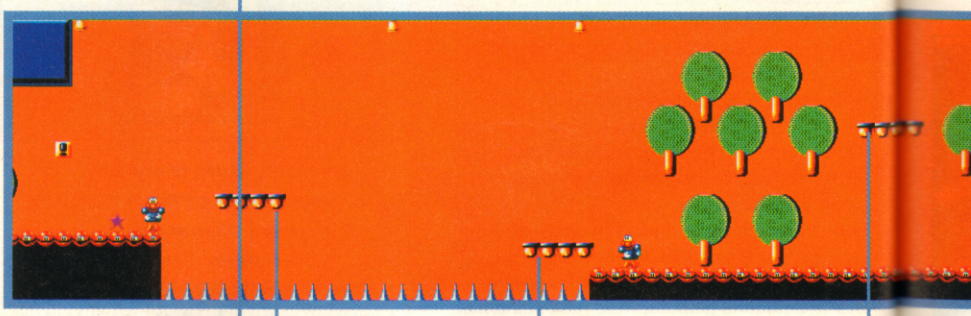
Robocod has taken all the best elements of every platform game from Manic Miner to Mario Bros and skillfully blended them together to form a hugely enjoyable and incredibly playable original.

You can tell from this fellow's expression that he's not the happiest of campers (probably because he spends all day jumping up and down on spikes), so steer well clear.



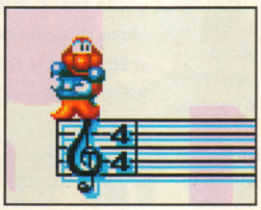
No, this arrow isn't pointing at the ceiling by mistake - it indicates the location of an invisible bonus hidden in the roof. Stand Robocod on the top tennis ball and make him stre-e-e-e-e-e-tch to collect it. There are loads of similarly concealed goodies waiting to be collected by the treasure-hunting player.

Robocod is packed full of some very strange bonuses, and they don't come much weirder than this one - a hoover. Robocod just has to touch it to pick it up, then he can start cleaning up the level. (Ho-ho!)



Aaaaiileeeee!!! Spikes! No need to tell you that these induce extreme pain in all fishy lifeforms (although I just appear to have done so anyway), and cause Robocod to lose one of his precious energy points. Avoid.

A spike jab makes Robocod leap high into the air with shock, giving the player a good chance to angle him onto the safety of a platform. Even in the deepest pit this super-high leap should see him to safety.



These moving platforms are the only way to get Robocod over the huge bed of pointy spikes. At first this may not seem sound so tough, but what you don't realise is that these platforms also go up, down, diagonally and even in circles! Players feeling particularly hard and clever can try to jump up and nab the bells at the top of the screen for extra bonus loveliness.

Bit of a strange platform, this. It seems to serve no other purpose than letting Robocod walk from one set of pong bats to the next without getting his fins dirty on the ground. Pretty useless, really. But who knows? Perhaps it somehow provides access to some secret bonuses or a hidden room. The only way to find out is to experiment.

Each of Robocod's three lives has three energy points, and one is lost everytime fish boy hits a baddy or touches spikes. These yellow stars award Robocod a new energy point up to a maximum of five. Truly a sight for sore eyes.

There's a point-packed colour TV to be grabbed, but it's stuck behind a wall of choccy chunks. What's a fish to do? Well, it's dead simple. Robocod just has to jump on top of that plunger thingy and this makes the choccy chunks drop to the bottom of the screen. Okay, so it's not exactly a problem of Gordian complexity, but this is one of the training levels, after all. Later examples of the use of plungers and switches are a bit trickier. (By the way, getting the TV makes the screen go black and white. Very strange.)

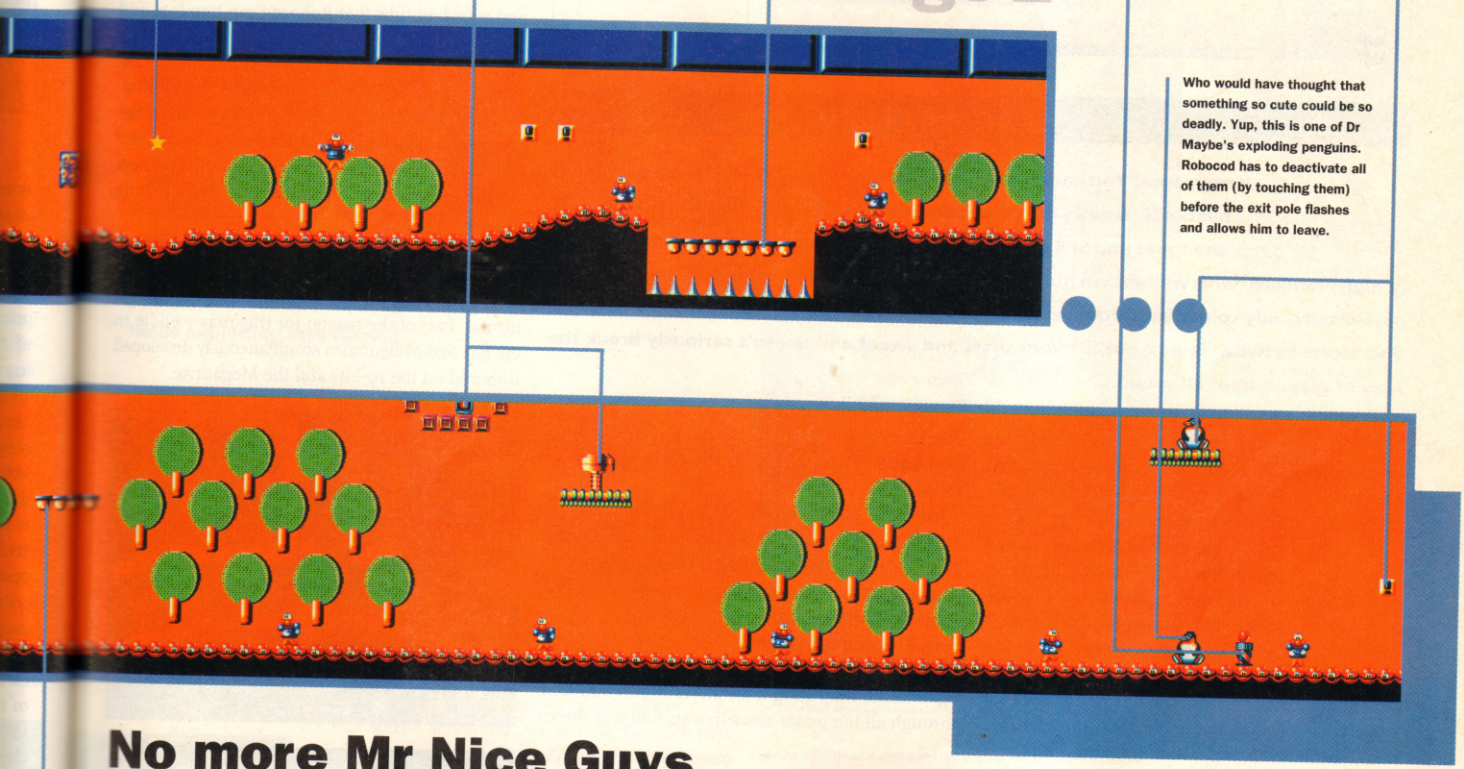
Come on, Millennium, what is going on? This platform doesn't move or disappear or do *anything*. It must be for something other than stopping Robocod falling in the spikes.

Now, how does Robocod reach that penguin? 'Cod can't jump that high, and even his amazing stretchy stomach is no use in this situation because there's nothing to hold onto. The answer lies in that small yellow block. These blocks litter the stages and when Robocod head-butts them various bonuses and goodies appear. In this case the block contains a pair of wings, which Robocod can strap on and use to fly up to the penguin.

And so, the end is near. This flashing barber's pole is what you've been looking for all stage. Come on and touch me.

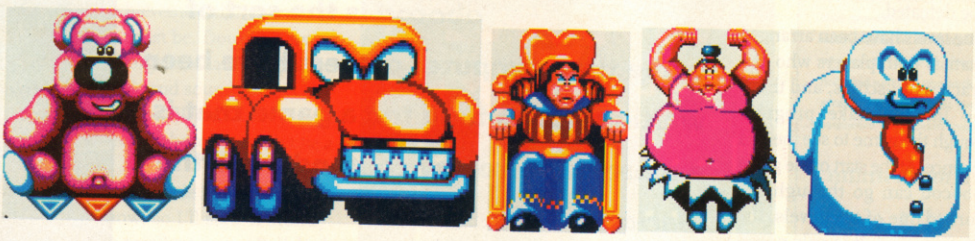
Who would have thought that something so cute could be so deadly. Yup, this is one of Dr Maybe's exploding penguins. Robocod has to deactivate all of them (by touching them) before the exit pole flashes and allows him to leave.

Level 1 Stage 2



No more Mr Nice Guys

For a cutesy game the super baddies are a pretty terrifying bunch. But fore-warned is fore-armed, so here's the full low-down on what they do.



BIG TED

Big Ted is very predictable. He flies around at the top of the screen, then drops down in an attempt to crush Robocod. But because he pauses before each crush there's plenty of time for 'Cod to nip out of harm's way.

CAR WARS

The giant car bounces left and right around the screen, then stops, opens its bonnet and unleashes a couple of speedy homing minis at 'Cod. Not nice at all.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

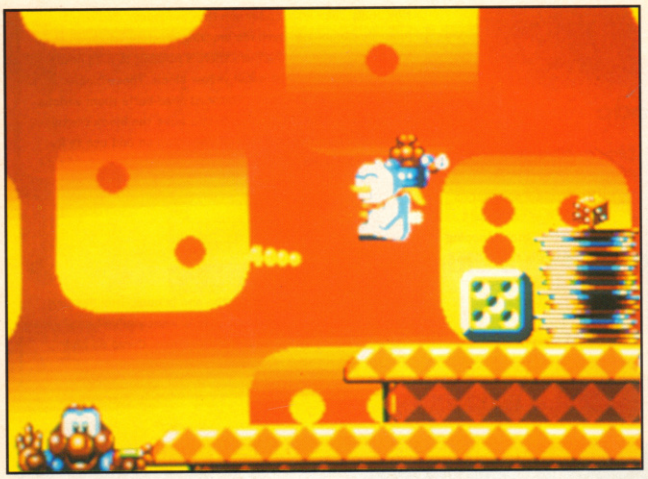
The biggest problem with this lovely lady is her speed. Like some overgrown Space Invader she zooms left and right, raining playing cards down on Robocod's head.

A NIGHT AT THE BALLET

Fighting the giant ballerina can get very confusing. The screen is mirrored down the middle, so there are two ballerina and two 'Cods on-screen. As the ballerinas furiously pirouette around, it's easy to lose track of which is real and which is fake.

SNOW BUSINESS

The final baddy. If you're big and hard enough to get this far then you should be able to work out how to beat him for yourself. And is there a surprise lurking under all that snow? Oh... Maybe.



(Left) Dicing with death on the games and pastimes level. Not the sort of place you'd expect to find rampant snowmen, is it?

(Below) All together now! We all live in a yellow submarine... This is one of the more James Pond like levels, where Robocod can't jump as normal and has to swin about instead. Fortunately his tall weapon is just as potent as ever, so make sure that any contact with the baddies is strictly via the butt.

Amiga version

Verrrry nice! You know you're in for something a bit special as soon as the hilariously bouncy *Robocop* theme remix kicks in on the title page. Indeed, the tunes and SFX are wonderful throughout. Graphics are of an equally high standard, with well-drawn humourous sprites gliding smoothly and quickly over parallaxed candy-colour backgrounds. Given the game's variety inevitably there's frequent disc access between levels, but it's very short and sweet and doesn't seriously break the flow of play. A treat all round.

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tall makes Robocod a big target, so it's fortunate that the baddies can't do him any damage while he's elongated. Any collisions with the baddies simply makes him snap back to normal size.

The Toy Factory is split into fourteen levels, each accessed via great oak doors. (There are further secret hidden levels for the player to discover, but they're not vital to completion to the game.) Each door is marked with a graphical clue to the sort of nasties which lurk inside, such as a tennis racquet on the door to the sports level, or a cuddly teddy on the door to the fluffy toys level. Some special doors are labelled with ominous-looking question marks, and these levels contain massive pseudo-'end-of-level' baddies to be defeated.

The levels have been arranged to satisfy both players who like to rack up hi-scores, and those who like to make progress through the game to see the end sequence. At the start of the game Robocod can go through the doors to one of two levels, the rest are locked. It is only necessary for the player to complete the harder of the two levels to progress on to the end-of-level-baddy room (which, when completed, leads to two more levels). Thus the 'points' player can try to do both levels and pick up as many bonuses and whack as many baddies as possible to get the high scores, while the impatient 'progress' player can just complete the level he has to and move on. Unfortunately it isn't possible to save game positions, but because the player can short-cut fairly quickly to where he left off the old problem of boredom from having to replay the early sections is reduced.

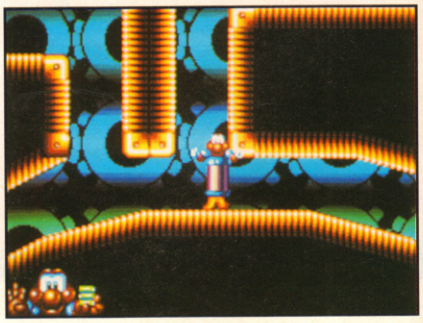
Each level is split down into a series of sections, with the player's aim being to locate the flashing EXIT pole. If it's found but it isn't flashing then that means that somewhere in the section there are still some of Maybe's exploding penguins active, in which case Robocod must find and deactivate them (by touching them) before he can leave. But due to intelligent linear map design, the player is generally lead through all the major areas in a section and therefore there's rarely the need for annoying and highly tedious back-tracking, a problem that seriously marred the player's enjoyment of the otherwise fine prequel *James Pond*. Usually the problem isn't so much finding the penguins, it's how to reach them.

Robocod is the sort of game that computer owners have been waiting a long time for, a game that is a more than worthy contender for the *Mario* throne.

The amount of variety is stunning, not just in terms of graphics and sound but also in terms of the differing tasks that the player is called upon to perform. Elements of just about every good platform game you can remember (*Mario, Sonic et al*) have been blended together to form a very tasty and in many ways unique mix. There are slow bits, there are fast bits, there are puzzly bits, there are against-the-clock bits - in short, something to suit everybody. Even on a console, with the huge amounts of memory they can access, Robocod would be remarkable feat of programming but on a humble 512K Amiga it's little short of incredible.

It would be a shame to give too much away - after all, half the fun of playing the game is discovering a section with an all new set of problems to solve and things to try out. But to give an idea of some of the treats that await, the player can expect to discover giant jellies and trampolines that bounce Robocod to astronomic heights, giant cars, planes and even bathtubs that Robocod can hop into and take for a spin (see the 'Come Fly With Me..." box for more on these bizarre modes of transport), cannons that shoot Robocod onto out-of-reach platforms, strap-on wings that ferry Robocod about the screen and upside-down levels where the player's controls are reversed (very confusing at first!). There are even underwater levels that play like a tribute to *James Pond*.

Robocod is the sort of game that computer owners have been waiting a long time for, a game that is a more than worthy contender for the *Mario* throne. Part of the reason for this may well lie in the fact that Millennium simultaneously developed Robocod on the 16-bits and the Megadrive.



COME FLY WITH ME...

There are times when Robocod's standard-issue hop, skip and jump just won't do. By head-butting special question-marked blocks Robocod may discover a whole host of fish-made vehicles to commandeer. But take care! Some blocks are booby-trapped and contain a high-speed nasty.

PLANES...

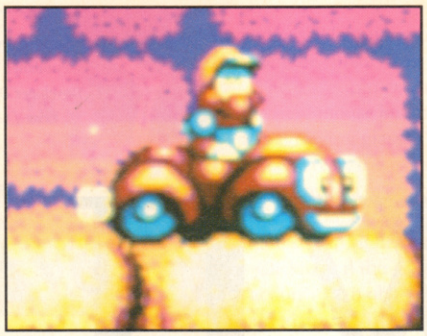
Robocod Air has an unrivalled reputation for safe, comfortable travel. From the big question-mark block, we can take you to anywhere in the game world. And our in-flight service is second to none. Robocod Air - you're a great way to fly.

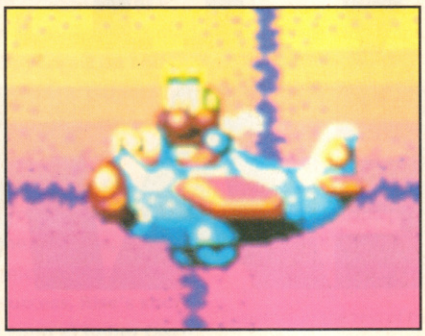
...BATHS(Eh?)...

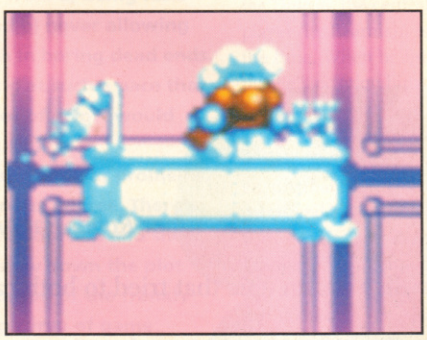
What could be better at the end of hard day than a nice, long soak? Using Heat Robocod's economy scheme you can have gallons of piping-hot water on tap at any time of the day or night. And our special bath suites allow you to fly around the screen (a feature unavailable from any competitor).

...AND AUTOMOBILES

The Robocod Red Roadster is the Ultimate Driving Experience. It's nippy in built-up areas. And it's unique bouncing ability (fitted as standard) gives the driver unlimited freedom to crush passing pedestrians. (Cue Berlin's 'Take My Breath Away' and lots of corn fields exploding into flame.)





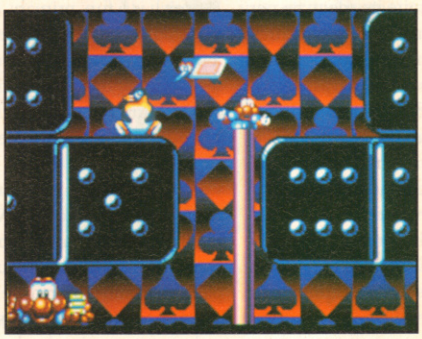


(Above top) Up, up and away! Robocod Air stewardesses will now be coming around with a selection of drinks and light refreshments.

(Above middle) I'm going to have to cut down on the aspirin. I'm sure I just saw a fish in a shower cap sitting in a bath flying by...

(Above) Robocod's Red Roadster patrols the mean streets of Level 2. The auto's unique bouncing suspension spells doom for any marauding meany.

(Below) A-ha! Found you! Robocod has to make frequent use of his stretch powers to find some of the more elusive exploding penguins.



(Left) This level is one of the most beautiful, with superb rotating cogs in the parallax background. It's also one of the fastest, with it's slopes and drops getting Robocod up to Sonic-like speeds.

(Below) Curiouser and curiouser... Here's Robocod floating through dreamy clouds of bath bubbles in his enamelled bathtime vehicle. The heavy inertia on the tub provides a new challenge for the player, very distinct from the running and jumping nature of the rest of the game.

Since the quality of platform games on the Megadrive and the Super Famicom is incredibly high, any new contender has to be at least as good as the last 'best' to stand any possible chance of success. And it would appear that the hard work going into the Megadrive version has had a knock-on effect on the 16-bit versions, raising them far above the usual standard of platform games on the home computers.

What's so amazing about Robocod is the fact that the majority of the project - design, programming and graphics - was the responsibility of one man, Chris Sorrell. When you consider that you have here a game comparable to *Mario IV* (which was designed by a team of over twenty Japanese coders) you begin to realise quite what an achievement this is, and just how talented Mr Sorrell must be. Doesn't it make you sick? But we musn't forget Richard Joseph, the man in charge of the music and sound, who is also deserving of special mention. Without his jaunty jingles and amusing effects Robocod wouldn't be a tenth of the game it is.

After all this praise and hyperbole I think you must be getting the idea by now, so I'll state it bluntly: Robocod is a completely excellent game. Polished, playable and - thank God - *fun*, it's like a sweet breath of fresh air in these days of rehashed film licenses, turgid strategy games and written-by-numbers shoot-'em-ups. As good as *Mario*? Mmmmm... not quite, but it's a close-run thing and few platform games even get within spitting distance of *Mario*'s benchmark-hitting lofty heights. But the best platform game on computer? Without the faintest shadow of a doubt. Skate down to your nearest software shop and give Robocod a prime fillet plaice in your software collection now.

● **David Upchurch**

RATINGS

Excellent control over Robocod.

Entertaining and varied game tasks.

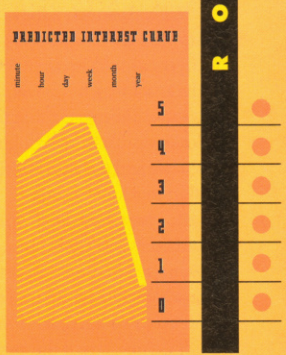
Lots of hidden bonuses and areas to discover.

Not incredibly tough to complete.

934 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	4	9	10

Great graphics and tunes provide the usual flashing-light lure to the platform addict. Fortunately Robocod boasts stacks of top-notch varied gameplay to back up its impressive aesthetics. That all-important element of any good platform game - control - is excellent, being smooth, responsive and precise. As in *Mario*, the player rarely gets killed by unfairness on the game's part, preventing joystick-throwing frustration setting in and enhancing the game's addictive qualities. Robocod is huge and, although it's not possible to disc-save positions, the levels are so designed that experienced players can traverse them pretty quickly if required, thus preventing early-level boredom setting in. With its stacks of secret rooms to discover, Robocod will pull you back time after time even when the end sequence is a distant memory.



ROBOCOD RATINGS

Genre Adventure
Publisher Sierra
Developer Dynamix
Price £34.99

WILLY BEAMISH

Remember *Roger Rabbit?* Disney's multi-million dollar cartoon/live action epic that tried to both capture the imagination of today's yoof and rekindle the old Saturday afternoon matinee feelings lying dormant in all those affluent adults? There was something for every

one. For the kids there was the crash bang animation and for the grown ups there was a bit of sauce courtesy of Jessica Rabbit and some outrageous mugging from Bob Hoskins. Despite its adequate performance at the box office, the movie was deemed to be in a two-stools situation, containing turn-off elements for both audiences. Grown-ups weren't overly keen on lashing out £8 to see a cartoon and ver kidz didn't understand half the jokes.

Willy Beamish adopts an alarmingly similar policy. It's unclear exactly which end of the market Sierra are pitching at. The evidence on one hand - the machines it runs on, the slick packaging and the cost would suggest that the title fits into Sierra's typically upmarket portfolio. The nature of the graphic style and the storyline, however, would seem more akin to a kids' game.

But hey, hey, hey! This ain't no comic strip for kids, it's an interactive cartoon, dontcha know?! Dynamix wanted to create something kinda sorta completely new, so into the pot went all these zany ideas and gosh darn if this ain't what we ended up with. Yup. Even if the gee-willickers wide-eyed goofyness of Dynamix' bullshit may stick in one's craw, you've got to admire their (entirely put on) daffy, frontiersman spirit. Don't be fooled, though. Willy Beamish is a fun, primary, cute candyfloss overcoat wrapped, with varying degrees of discomfort, around a tried and tested adventure formula.

Beamish and his companion (a frog called Horny) live in Frumpton, USA; School's nearly out for the summer and all Willy dreams of is winning the National Nintari Gaming Championships which will be held during his summer break. The player's most basic aim is to keep Willy out of trouble during his spare time and keep in his gaming ability to National standard by regular Nintari practice. A plethora of sub-plots radiate from this central theme. The key to Willy's Nintari system gets confiscated, so he can't practise, he doesn't have the necessary entrance fee to the tournament etc. Displeasing Willy's parents will lead to a rise in the reading of the Willy's Trouble-thermometer. Too high a reading and Willy will be punished...

Presented in flawless Dynamix watch'n'click animation, the plot opens with Beamish, all gangly legs

(Above) What has it got in its pockets? Beamish is a right little object-horder, and it's here in the inventory screen that the things which Willy has can be used.

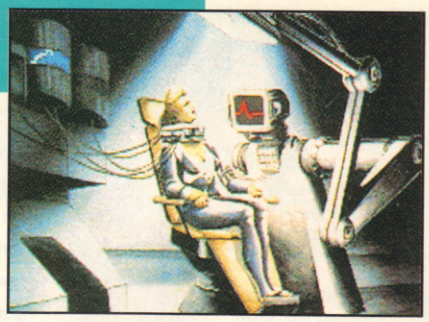
and quiff, sitting in the term's final assembly snoring his way through a particularly turgid end-of-"semester" speech by Principal Frick.

Horny (who lives in Willy's rucksack) presumably has a lower tedium tolerance level than the pupils and pounces on Frick, causing much pandemonium and dislodging the slap-headed Principal's ginger wig. Red faces all round and a detention for Willy.

It's during the Detention scene while Willy dreams of Nintari fame and a dotty old spinster deals out a yawnsome assignment that, finally, the player comes into the game. The cursor changes from the waiting watch icon to an arrow, indicating that there's some interaction to be had.

As expected, the introductory sequence is entertaining enough and can be skipped through or completely bypassed should the player desire.

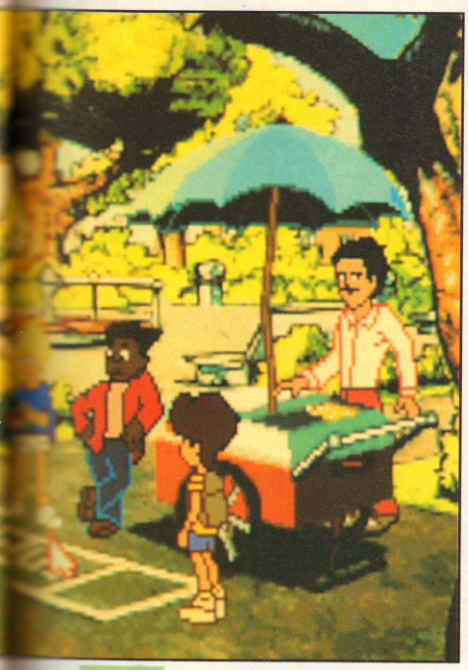
Once into the game itself, the familiar Dynamix interaction format is adopted, albeit in its latest stage of polish. Head & shoulders shots of characters montage over the fade-out backgrounds while in conversation. The smart cursor floats over the play area changing between an impassive diagonal arrow and a smaller "action" arrow indicating that there's an object to be taken or manipulated or a task to perform. Exits are denoted by a large green Exit sign and possible sources of conversation are indicated when the cursor turns into a speech bubble.



Compare & Contrast

It was *Rise of the Dragon* (an ACE Covergame, in fact) that first made UK software buyers sit up and pay attention to Dynamix games. The story of a futuristic detective endeavouring to solve a complex narcotic related murder gripped both public and reviewers alike for all of a fortnight. The problem with the game, you see, was that it simply ended too quickly. Partially a symptom of its own success, Rise's short-term appeal resulted from a) being fascinatingly addictive and b) never allowing the player to languish in boring dead ends. The game moves along at such a pace that players putting in a lot of effort would finish it rather too quickly.

Beamish suffers from similar problems, although to a less serious degree. There's enough freedom of exploration and sheer distance to cover to slow down the plot sufficiently - an indication of the frankly unbelievable learning curve of game development of which Dynamix a surely coming to the end.



The player can examine objects by clicking with the right mouse button and turning his arrow into a magnifying glass. To save clicking over "dead" screen areas, the glass will remain opaque as the cursor moves over objects for which there is no description, becoming clear when something of interest is in sight. A neat touch.

Clicking on the left mouse button will cause an "action". If an object is near the cursor, it will be picked up, if Willy is near his Nintari, he'll begin to play and so on. If the cursor is currently over an exit, a message will remind the player exactly where that route leads. When you consider that the disk is accessed virtually every time Willy leaves a room it's vital that no effort is wasted to-ing and fro-ing between erroneously selected locations.

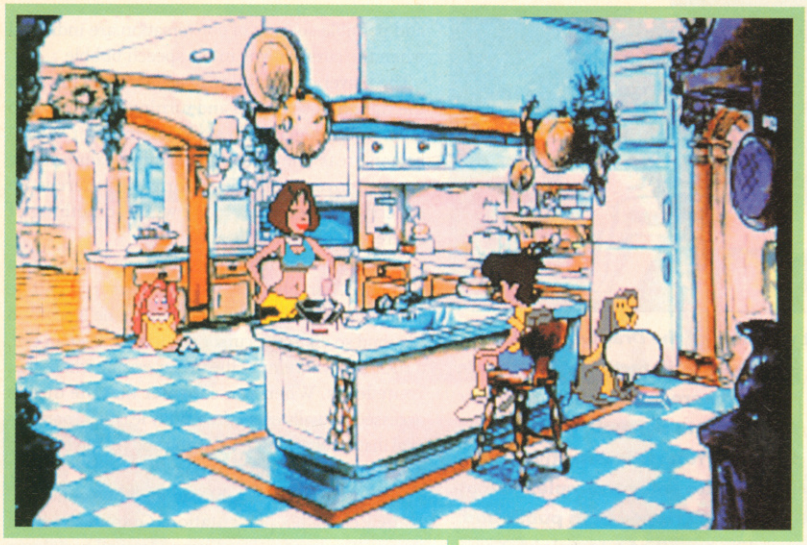
A great deal of thought and care has gone into Willy Beamish's presentation. Graphically it's a dream. The hand-painted super-detailed backdrops will be the most familiar point of reference for Dynamix fans. In 256 colour VGA, they are quite superb, and work surprisingly well with the cartoony nature of the rest of the game. Distinct from *Rise of the Dragon*, the central character controlled by the player (ie; Beamish) is visible on screen nearly all the time. When he interacts with objects and people, he'll position himself in an appropriate place to do so.

This is a more important point than it may seem at first. Dynamix have gone to a lot of trouble to ensure that Willy's character comes through in the game, and having him on the screen moving around is by far the most dramatic way to keep him at the forefront of the player's mind. The whole point is that the player is supposed to behave as Willy would, not as themselves. Having Willy sitting on a chair in the kitchen dangling his legs may not seem like an especially worthwhile expenditure of disk and memory space, but it helps stuffy old grown ups slip into character more easily.

Surprisingly, perhaps the part of the game into which the most effort has gone is the least noticeable. Willy Beamish is absolutely rife with animated touches which continually flit around adding interest and humour. However, perhaps because the job of making the player feel that he is watching a cartoon has been so professionally achieved, it's easy to take these touches for granted. After all, it'd be a pretty boring cartoon if only the foreground characters moved, wouldn't it? If that sounds churlish, good. It's possibly the best accolade that I can pay Dynamix' impossibly successful first try at mimicking the cartoon genre. On this level, at least, the game works fantastically well, fooling the player into believing he's an impassive viewer and then allowing him to progress the story, in however limited segments, to satisfy himself.

The pacing of the stories of Dynamix games has been criticised in the past. *Rise of the Dragon* was a particularly good example of the team's reluctance to let gameplay get in the way of good storytelling. The determination to continually pull the player through the story meant that the game was really ▶72

he game works fantastically well, fooling the player into believing he's only an impassive viewer and then allowing him to progress the story to satisfy himself.



(Above) Willy, in a constant effort to keep himself out of trouble, agrees to chop up some vegatables for his mom (who is actually quite tasty). Performing little tasks like this, while occasionally using up valuable time, often prove a useful source of cash.

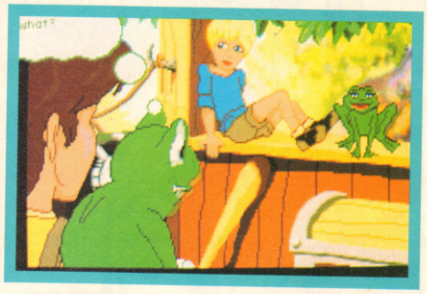
Meet the crew!

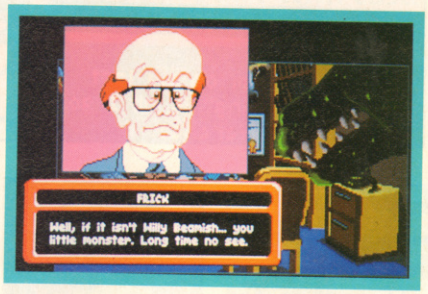
Here we have a breakdown of the most important characters in the game. All of which must be dealt with in Willy's own individual style if the player is going to save Frumpton. Working clockwise from the top left; Willy himself. Cute, nine, and fresh out of school for the holidays; Leona Humpford and Louis the man who runs the plumber's union. Why is this snobby society dame in cahoots (and a hot tub) with this grease-monkey? Dad. He's in a whole lot of trouble. He's got no job. Brianna, your sister. Mr Frick, boring, bald and bland, the fiery-tempered slap-head is a source of constant fear for little Willy. And finally, your frog, Horny.

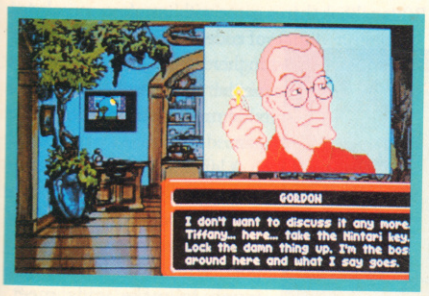
(Above) Urk! More haste, less speed and all that. In Willy's hurry to get his chopping over and done with, he's gone and done himself a mischief. And he's wounded his prime Nintari gaming hand - this is serious!

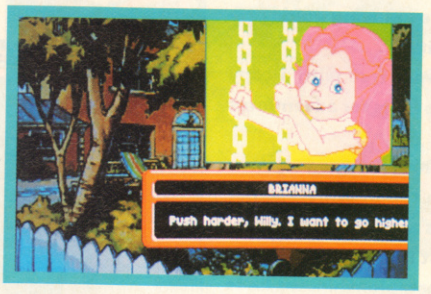
(Below) A quick dash upstairs to the bathroom (without taking the opportunity to see if your bitch sister Tiffany is "entertaining" a male friend, thankyou) and Willy may yet be able to save his thumb.

Basic icons for family structures, while being about as subtle as being hit on the head with a brick, make it easy for the player to deal with complex dialogue.









(Left) Once in the bathroom, a quick search will reveal the first aid kit under the sink. Now, what was it they were always telling Willy in school about germs?

(Below) A thorny problem. Everyone knows how much nine-year-olds hate pain, but will the relief of avoiding the awfully stingy antiseptic sting stand you in good stead for all that frantic stick waggling later on?

IN CHARACTER

Just like any cartoon, Willy Beamish is packed full of colourful characters to meet and befriend. Adventure games have always had a hard time convincing players that they are dealing with anything other than a complex fall-through menu system, but Beamish manages better than most.

Early adventures which purported to include individual characters which go about their business were, to be honest, laughable. Even games heralded as landmarks for their time like *The Hobbit* are pretty neanderthal by Willy's standards.

The most common problem was that of essentially simple characters trying to converse using an equally simple language parser. Quite often it was tricky enough to Pick Up The Axe. And given the myriad possibilities of language and dialogue, it's hardly surprising that you could never make Thorin understand anything you said.

Here, by limiting the interaction with the characters with use of multiple choice options, the designers have allowed each response to yield a reasonably interesting branch.

It's the characters in Beamish which bring the game alive. They all have their own traits and foibles, and help pep up the story even when nothing of significant benefit to the plot is going on.

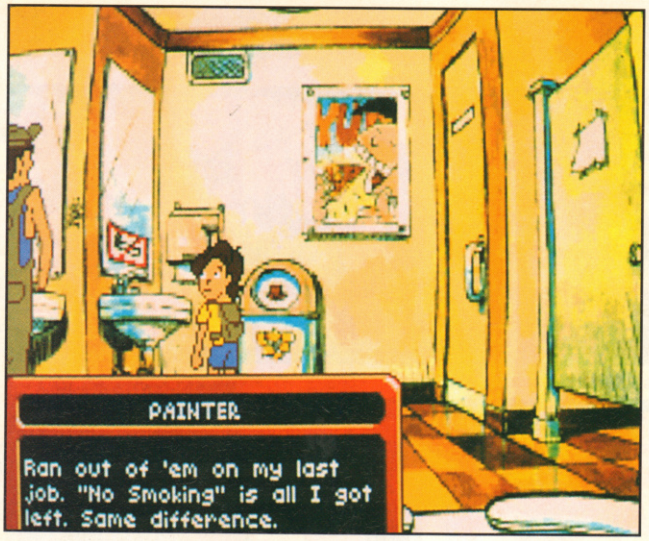
In times of stress and frustration, it's tempting to speak to anyone just to pass the time (talk about art immitating life). However, Willy must take care, for a careless word from the mouth of a nine-year-old can lead to hellish consequences meated out by big, grumpy adults.

Also, the fact that everyone in Beamish fits neatly into their own little stereotype makes it easy to use the characters to your advantage. Heaven help us when anyone works out how to mimick real personalities and character in real life, or we'll spend out whole lives *genuinely* misunderstanding and getting aggravated with each other.

69▶ pretty easy, and enormous pointers were continually being given as to what exactly the player should do next. The success of the storyline was the downfall of the game. You wouldn't expect a futuristic detective movie to last particularly long, and nor did the game.

Willy Beamish is a far more accomplished title in this area. Use of "Meanwhile" cutaway scenes will yield information about which Willy would otherwise remain ignorant, and these help, but it's the development of plot aspects which the player can't act upon at the time which really do the trick.

Frumpton itself is a sizable place, and quite apart from anything else, there's a lot of exploring to do. What with it being the summer break, Willy has a lot of freedom and he can travel around Springfield pretty much as he pleases, as long as he's at home in time for bed. To an extent, this freedom helps to combat the feeling of being led by the hand through the adventure, since on a geographic level at least, it's so flexible.



(Left) Just like any regular school kid, Willy seems to spend an unnatural amount of time in the lavatory. But now he's been found out!

The continual change between first person perspective and that of a comic book helps the player retain the feeling that he is Willy while providing enough variety to prevent the screen format from looking stayed.

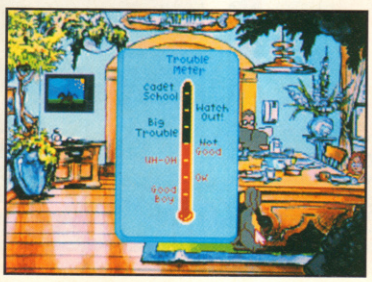
MY, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PACKET!

Sierra are, without any question, kings of the Packaging empire. Their products simply stink of class and care. None of your photocopied sheets sellotaped to a registration card here. Oh no. And every Sierra game comes with a completely free playing guide presented in a manner appropriate to the game itself.

***Leisure Suit Larry 5*, for example, comes free with a copy of *Playspy* magazine, offering some useful game hints for adventurers who take the time to look.**

In Willy Beamish's case, however, we have Willy's very own private note book. Now this is a real gem. On top of Willy's rather amusing juvenile drawings of A-10 Tank killers and his rampant fantasies about being interviewed by top TV host Dan Lather after his triumph at the forthcoming Nintari Games Championship, we have some useful information about Frumpton and its environs, the character flaws of many local folk and so on. All in lovely colour.

Yet again, the Americans show us the way to present games and make them feel like a package, rather than a box of disks.



(Above) The Trouble-o-meter! This is the key to Willy's success. If he gets himself in seriously deep water, he may end up grounded!

Beamish isn't so flexible where the story branching is routed through dialogue. Willy's responses to other characters' questions are, at best, limited to about three choices. Frequently, the options are so limited that playing feels more like reading a Fighting Fantasy book than a game with umpteen megabytes of code. Some options are only in there to be ignored, since they neither progress the plot or provide more than a funny-once gag.

A large subplot in the game features Willy's dad Gordon looking for a job. Recently fired from a reasonably senior management post, Willy's dad is finding it tough to make ends meet. Unbeknown to Gordon, the only firm in town willing to interview him - the TootSweet artificial sweetener company - are in unspecific but undoubtedly grizzly cahoots with roughhouse plumbers' union bosses. They somehow plan to take over the town and are looking for a dweeby fall guy to take the rap. Willy must prevent his dad from getting the job or persuade him it's a bad idea without explaining why. As you can imagine, this leads to much hilarious misunderstanding and some scorching scores on the Trouble-thermometer.

A daunting subject for the writers, I'm sure, is that Willy Beamish is A Funny Game. Humour has traditionally been the element which has made American games blatantly incompatible with the UK market. Far worse than an iffy sound card problem, a cheesy Yank gag will have Brit gamers grinding their teeth like there's no tomorrow. While we're all splitting our sides over delicate inflection-driven double entendres, the Americans are hitting each other with custard pies. Well, that's what we're keen to believe.

The humour running through Beamish is refreshingly universal. By keeping it on a sufficiently lightweight level (bald people are funny, eating pizza makes people fart) and relying on the actual characterisation of the other people in the game to make the scenes funny, the game works. An occasional toe-curler can be found in the "ironic" descriptions

While we're all splitting our sides over delicate inflection-driven double entendres, the Americans are hitting each other with custard pies.

(Left) Willy's home town of Frumpton. It's around these locations where Beamish and his pals get into all their top-notch japes.

of the objects and locations but for the most part, the heavy clowning has been left alone.

Character behaviour is surprisingly realistic, albeit stereotypical. Perhaps because of the cartoon caricature nature of their actions, it's a lot easier to predict their moods and act in a way that will benefit Willy accordingly. Basic icons for family structures, while about as subtle as being hit on the head with a brick, make it easy for the player to find his way through reasonably complex dialogue routines. Gordon is in a bad mood because of his joblessness, and so when he asks Willy to do a favour, it's best to act immediately. Willy's sister Tiffany is a spoilt bitch and deserves to be treated with utter contempt. And Mom is strict but fair. You get the general picture.

So, what's the deal? An interactive cartoon? Well, yes actually. But remember that cartoons have their limitations. Just as Dynamix have accurately captured the humour and improbability of comics, they've brought with them some comics' undesirable baggage. Just as it's easy to find amusement with the glaring social inadequacies of the characters and the 'tache twiddling schemes of the bad guys, it's easy to get frustrated at the apparent lack of complexity and subtlety inherent in the nature of such a kinetic, cartoony environment.

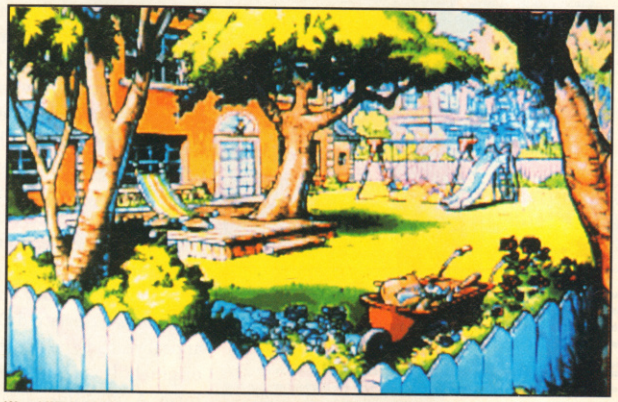
What is undeniable, is that Beamish should do away with the longevity criticisms aimed at Dynamix recently. It's a big old game and although it has its frustrations, there's plenty of awe-inspiring innovation too.

Sierra and Dynamix seem to have made a rod for their own backs by simply producing games of too high a quality on a regular basis. Certainly when compared to lots of its contemporaries, it is an outright winner. It's a graphic marvel, is big enough to keep most players occupied for a good few weeks and is even more polished than the shiny chrome dome of principal Frick.

● Jim Douglas

PC Version

PC Owners should be thoroughly familiar with Sierra's style. Classy packaging, excellent manual and plenty of disks. Playing from floppy is an absolute no-no and the constant hard drive access can turn into a bit of a chore. Owners of VGA machines are in for a visual feast (the shots on these pages are VGA) sound board owners (both Roland and Ad Lib) are mercifully saved from the ghastly beep-beep interpretation of the incidental music. A sound investment.



(Above) Willy's back garden. He must venture far afield from his comfortable yuppie parent's home in Frumpton in order to set the world to rights and win that Nintari Championship.

RATINGS

ACE GRAPHICS

Beeeoootiful graphics
Innovative new twist on theme
Plenty to explore

It's a cartoon!
It's an adventure!
What is it?

795 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	6	8	7

Okay, okay, okay. So you've bought a few of Sierra's adventure games in the past and theyive all gripped your interest to a greater or lesser extent. But why should you lash out what is undeniably a hefty sum of cash on yet another which seems to operate on the same system. Well, you old cynic. For a start Willy *is* sufficiently different in style and content to maintain your interest for a reasonable period, but more importantly, it's a big step forward in gaming. Long after you complete the game, you'll be coming back to examine the extra tweaks and touches which the design team have included. However, as an adventure in itself, it's long term appeal is in question. The cute charaters may well become just too much to identify with, even despite their tongue-in-cheeck nature. The rewards are there for those willing to play the game as it was intended.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

WILLY BEAMISH RATINGS

Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean
Developer Digital Image Design
Price £25.99

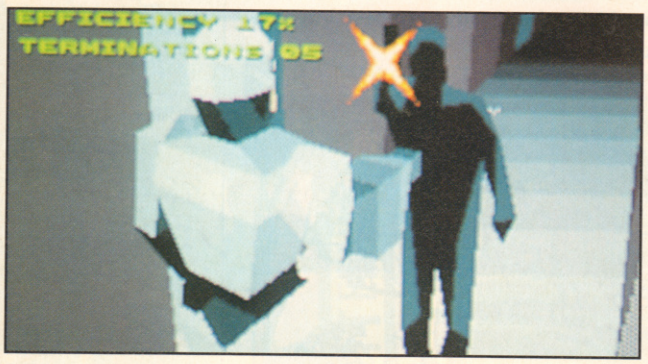
ROBOCOP 3

It's got to be said that as a concept Robocop has always been a bit... well... ludicrous. I mean, how can you really take Robocop seriously as 'The Future of Law Enforcement' when theoretically he could quite easily be destroyed by a single shot in his woefully unprotected face? And with that shiny plastic

armour and mincing walk you can't help but feel that on seeing him really hardened criminals would be splitting their sides rather than wetting their pants. Indeed, without the films' darker-than-dark humour and over the top violence, it's doubtful whether audiences would have been able to accept Robocop as anything other than a complete laughing stock.

So, given this somewhat ridiculous creation and the hyper-success of the crime-bustin' Turtles, it's perhaps not so surprising to learn that Robocop is currently being groomed for a somewhat younger, less-demanding and potentially more lucrative audience. Already the Kevlar-coated copper has made successful forays into comics and cartoons, and apparently in the new sequel the graphic violence of the previous films is being drastically toned down for a lower certificate. Whether you consider it cynical exploitation or not, you've got to admit that as a marketing move it's flawlessly brilliant. Just think of all the spin-off merchandising possibilities: "In your own home re-enact the exciting moment when Robocop shoots the rapist in the nuts with the Robocop 3 Back Alley PlaySet!" The mind boggles.

Of course, clever old Ocean saw Robocop's kids' appeal years ago when it licensed the tin tit-head's original film for conversion into computer game form. A phenomenal success, it arguably set the standard for Ocean's film licence 'formula', i.e. take



(Above) Kerr-zap! Robocop gets it in the face from one of the backlit bad guys. These 'out-of-Robocop' views in the foot patrol sections may look impressive, but they make the actual task of winning the game very difficult. Better to stay inside your skull.

(Right) In the intro animation to one of the patrol car sequences, Robocop speeds down one of Old Detroits run-down streets. Note the flashing red-and-blue lights on top of the car.

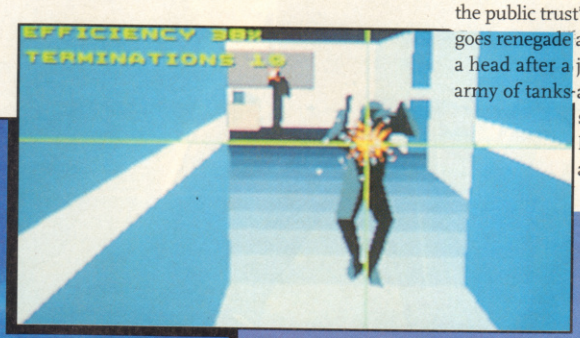
some simple platform action and add a few equally-simplistic puzzle or shoot-'em-up levels to add variety. It's a formula that's been much criticised recently, with the *Darkman* and *Terminator 2* games showing definite signs that the long-dead horse has been flogged beyond its limits.

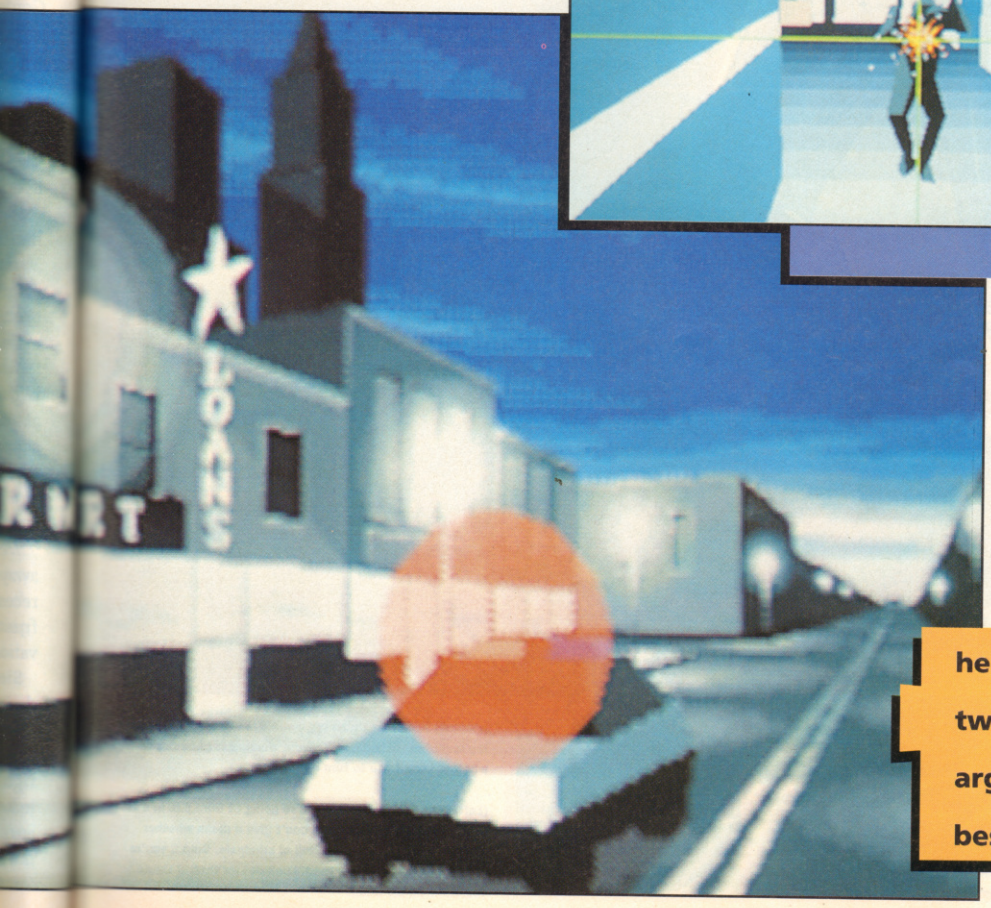
Following last year's *Robocop 2* game, which was little more than a slicker version of the original, Ocean really had no option but to do something special and different with Robocop 3. After all, I doubt whether even the most fanatical Robocop groupy would be able to stand a third platforms n' puzzles outing. And it certainly aroused more than a little interest from the computer press when Ocean announced that Digital Image Design were to be Robocop 3's developers. Best known for 3D-polygon affairs such as *F-29 Retaliator* and the oft-delayed-but-finally-to-appear-soon *Epic*, many expressed surprise and more than a little disbelief that DID had received the job. Many joked that this was going to be Robocop in 3D. But the jokes on them because... it is. And a few niggles aside, the good news is that the 3D twist works amazingly well and arguably makes Robocop 3 the best film licence yet.

On loading up the player is given the option to play either the Movie Game or the Arcade Game. In the Movie Game the player takes part in various sequences ordered according to events in the film, while in the Arcade Game the player can choose between five games, each a variant on sections in the Movie Game.

Compare & Contrast

In terms of graphics, there couldn't be more difference between Robocop 3 and Ocean's previous Robocop 2 game. Out are sprites and platforms and in are polygons. However, fans of the films' excessive violence will be pleased to hear that the body count in both games are on a satisfyingly similar high level. Although Robocop 2 was perhaps a slightly more enjoyable - albeit unoriginal - game, as a film-like experience Robocop 3 wins hands down, and as such comes highly recommended.





Not only do these provide a good chance to practice the various game elements before they're encountered in the Movie Game, they're sufficiently different in their own right to add extra value to the package as a whole.

With the Robocop 3 movie not due until Spring/Summer of next year, the Robocop 3 game is in the unusual position of appearing some time before the actual film itself. This brave move gives some indication of how special Ocean believe their game to be, with the company happy to let the game stand or fall on its own merits rather than coat-tail the film's publicity and hype. And if nothing else, it provides fans of the film with a sneaky preview of the plot.

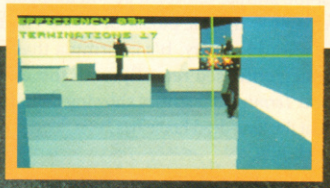
Robocop 3's story kicks off with the shock announcement of OCP's takeover by Kanemitsu Industries, a ruthless Japanese company. Keen to accelerate the construction of Delta City, OCP have formed friendly REHAB units to rehouse the tenants of Old Detroit. At least, that's what Joe Public is being told. In reality, the REHABs are using terror tactics to clear the slums by force, making thousands homeless in the process.

In desperation the terrorised citizens band together to fight back. Through means too complex to go into here, Robocop finds out about these dirty dealings. Unable to disobey his prime directives to 'Uphold the public trust' and 'Protect the innocent' Robocop goes renegade and joins the rebels. Things come to a head after a jet-suited Robocop defeats a small army of tanks and ED-209s sent in to reduce the slum area to rubble. The disgraced Kanemitsu Industries decide to put an end to Robocop's meddling once and for all, and the film climaxes in a titanic clash between Robocop and Kanemitsu's robotic Ninja assassin! Exciting, eh?

The game is split into eight major action set-pieces. In between each set-piece there are chunks of plot related by a combination of 'Meanwhile...' screens and vector/bitmap animated sequences. Most commonly these are framed as 'Mediabreak' news reports, with the ever-smiling news readers happily relaying the latest mass murders and body count figures to the camera. These, in particular, work very well, neatly conveying relevant information in a manner appropriate to the movie. Good use is made of TV-style flash graphics and muted colour tones, and the presentation throughout is exemplary.

The eight action set-pieces are based around four ▶78

he good news is that the 3D twist works amazingly well and arguably makes Robocop 3 the best film licence yet.

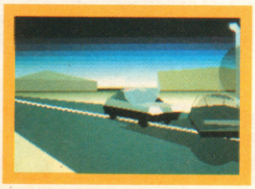


Robocop's unique cybervision provides a green crosshair with which to aim the hand-gun. As street punks run from around alleyway corners or urban terrorists pop up from behind desks, some deft mouse work is required on the part of the player to fill them full of lead before they fill you full of holes.

The enemy attack with either guns or grenades. Gun-toting villains are the fastest on the attack and therefore the most immediate threat so take them out as soon as you see them. When dealing with the grenade throwers, shoot the bombs first then the bomber.

Hey you! Be careful with that gun! Nobody cares about a dead perp but nobody likes a grandad killer.

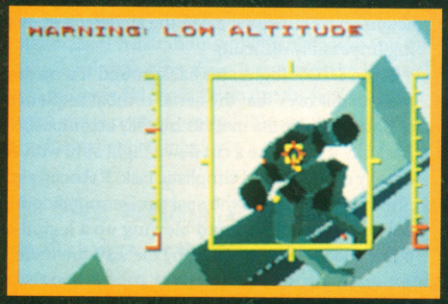
Villains don't start attacking until they're fairly close, so wait until a potential target has fully emerged from the gloom before you start blasting. That way you'll avoid costly game-ending errors of judgement.



(Far left) Right, Mr Robocop, if you'd like to pull away into the main flow of traffic. I'll give a warning in good time whether I want you to turn left or right.

(Left) Errr... do you realise you're going at 80m.p.h. in a built-up area, Mr Robocop? I don't give a damn whether you're chasing a stolen van full of criminals. Gulp... you're on the wrong side of the road. Look out for that...! Brace yourself!! Oh my God!!!

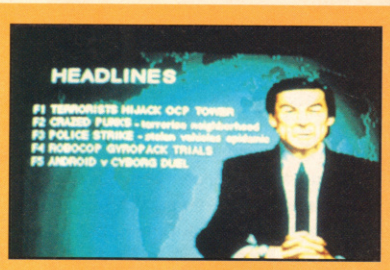
(Above) The arrogant Otomo taunts Robocop with a threat of death and waves a Katana in his face (that's giant oriental sword to you, chummy). (Inset) Ha! Not so clever now, are we Mr Karate Chop. A Good Ol' Fashioned Heart of the U.S. of A. Punch sends Otomo flying back like a plank of wood.



Robocop's toughest challenge is the pitched battle between himself and a legion of ground and air troops.

Use Robocop's powerful cannon to destroy the choopers first - they're the most dangerous. When attacking the ground units swoop in from high up, blasting as you go, then pull up out of danger. Skimming along near ground level is too risky.

The hand-to-hand combat is incredibly frustrating at first, with Otomo beating Robocop to the ground time after time. The trick is to learn Otomo's attack pattern. He always jumps in, does a bit of thumping then leaps away. Punch just as Otomo's landing then move out of range of his sword and you should do okay. If possible angle in again to punch him from the side or the back.



PICTURES AT ELEVEN...

Each of the five Arcade Games is treated as a news item on Mediabreak. *Take it away, Casey...*

... And the five top stories tonight:

● The OCP employees held hostage by terrorists were freed tonight when company heads sent in Robocop to deal with the situation. Police chiefs, who had been attempting a peaceful negotiated settlement, called the move irresponsible and claimed that the hostages' lives had been put unnecessarily at risk.

● Splatterpunk gang leaders were reported to be bowed but not defeated after their unsuccessful skirmish with heavily-armed police units in the slum areas of Old Detroit last night. OCP categorically denied allegations that the 'Punks were fighting to protect their homes from ruthless redevelopers. "Rubbish. These are just common street scum. They just happen to have high-power machine guns", said an OCP spokesman.

● Detroit police claimed another victory in the war against car theft today when they caught thieves red-handed trying to steal an antique Rolls-Royce. The owner, millionaire Anton Gere, was also arrested when police discovered the Rolls ran on unleaded petrol. In an ironic twist, judges awarded Gere a longer prison sentence than the thieves.

● Today the public gots its first glimpse of Robocop's new Gyropack unit as it was taken through its first street trials. OCP officials were reported to be 'delighted', adding "Robo's fought 'em on the streets and on the roads, now he'll fight 'em in the skies."

● Tomorrow sees the contest between OCP and Kanemitus Industries to see who can build the better robot. Kanemitsu's robotic Ninja will face off against Detroit's very own Robocop in a slug match to be broadcast live on this channel. Go Robo!

This is Casey Wong reporting live for Mediabreak. Remember: You give us five minutes, and we'll give you the World.

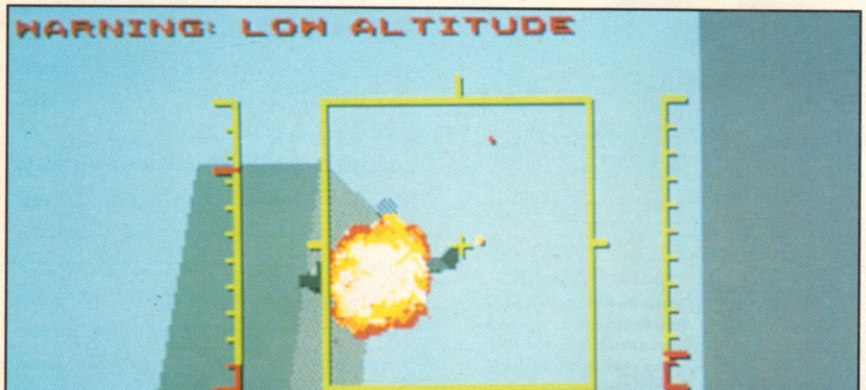
(Above) First mission accomplished! The OCP held hostage by the terrorists have been safely rescued by Robocop without a single civilian injury.

(By the way, you're free people now, so put your hands down.)

75 ▶ The eight action set-pieces are based around four main events: Robocop patrolling on foot, in a patrol car and in the air (courtesy of his sexy new Gyropack) and fighting a Ninja opponent mano à mano.

The most enjoyable and involving of all these is the foot patrol. The player views the action through Robo's 'eyes'. As Robo clanks through the streets of Old Detroit or the corridors of the OCP Tower, punks and terrorists leap out of the shadows, attacking with guns and grenades and gradually eroding Robocop's efficiency (the robotic equivalent of health). Via some sharp work with the mouse, the player can return fire with the aid of a green crosshair and a tap of the left button. But it's not quite the turkey shoot is sounds. Mind-numbingly stupid civilians amble into the midst of the raging firefight, and shooting one of them causes an immediate system shut-down due to the conflict with Robocop's prime directives.

Frequently there are times in the game when you do actually feel like you're taking part in the film.



(Below) The Gyropack seqeunces play like a much-simplified flight sim. Thanks to the miracle of our hero's Robovision, the player can get find out where the air and ground targets are using the colour-coded map in the centre of the screen. The bars to the sides indicate speed and altitude.

A neat (and realistic) touch is that the corpses of the slain villains don't disappear, but remain littering the alleyways (which is handy on the maze-like levels for keeping track of where you've been - a bit like a gorier version of Theseus' ball of thread). Some (for want of a better term) 'out-of-Robocop' views are available, but although they look good they don't make the process of actually playing the game any easier.

At their core these sequences are little more than *Operation Wolf* clones, with success simply being a question of shooting the bad guys before they shoot you. But the freedom to walk smoothly about the detailed 3D environment and the sombre graphic design add a whole new dimension to the action. Rather than attempt to depict the assailants and the innocents realistically (which given the obvious colour and detail limitations on the home systems would probably have failed miserably), DID have gone for a more impressionist style, with figures little more than moodily backlit outlines.

It all works incredibly well, with a surprising amount of tension building up as the shadowy civilians/creeps emerge from the gloom - and for once the player actually does feel as if he is Robocop, dispensing harsh but fair justice from the barrel of his gun through the means streets of Old Detroit.

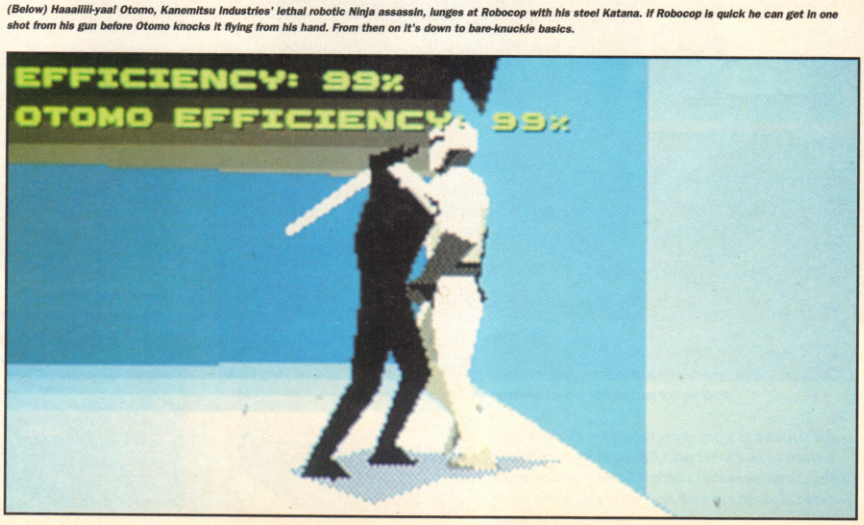
The patrol car sequences work equally well from a technical point of view, but are less satisfying gameplay wise. Again the player views the world from Robocop's eyes as he sits in the seat of his patrol car. Although the roads are fairly busy and there are plenty of well-detailed roadsigns, telegraph poles and toll-booths along the side of the road, there's a curious sparseness of any actual buildings. Obviously the OCP's demolition work is more advanced than people think. Generally the aim is to locate an escaping criminal's vehicle and ram it off the road *Chase H.Q.*-style while avoiding the civilian cars. Every collision or shot reduces Robocop's efficiency, and the trick is to do more damage to the criminals than they do to you. This is not easy, especially as the perps are packing some heavy-duty firepower.

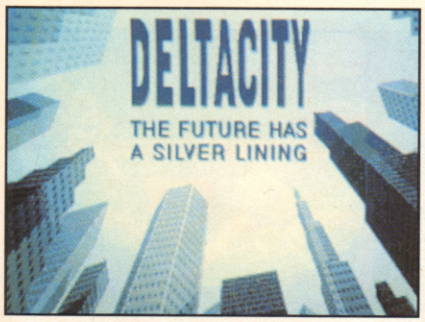
The joystick control is simple left/right/accelerate/decelerate, with the SPACE bar used for rapid braking. The car accelerates slowly between 0 and 30 m.p.h., but at speeds above this a special turbo kicks in, rapidly bringing the car's speed up to 80m.p.h. It's a good control system, allowing precise movement around corners while still permitting rapid progress on the straights. While it's possible for the player to drive off the road, it severely limits the player's top speed, so any short-cut taking should be considered carefully. Often it's better to take the what initially appears to be the longer route. Again, a variety of alternative views are available, with some good 'chase' ones where a floating camera moves around the scene finding the best angle on the action (even if they do make the actual job of driving impossibly difficult).

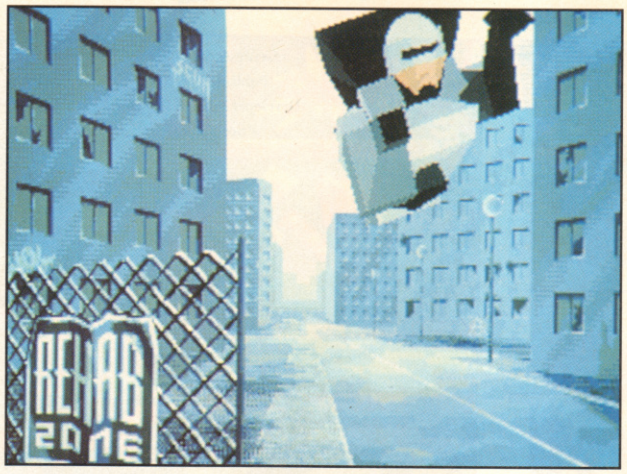
Given DID's flight sim background it's no surprise to discover that the aerial combat sequences of Robocop 3 are the most technically accomplished. Basically it plays like a cut-down flight sim, with an equally cut-down and simplistic task. Robocop simply has to fly around the spartan Detroit shooting down a few choppers and blowing up a legion of tanks and ED-209s (which, by the way, are incred-

(Above) This one-off 'shooting gallery' sequence occurs if Robocop rebels against the REHABs at the church. Robo has to shoot all of the REHAB troopers before his efficiency is reduced to 50%. If Robocop fails, he's forced to retreat back into the church and must try to make good his escape through the sewers below. Unfortunately these are packed with REHAB officers. Students, this is known as a 'no-win' situation.

(Below) Haaaliiii-yaa! Otomo, Kanemitsu Industries' lethal robotic Ninja assassin, lunges at Robocop with his steel Katana. If Robocop is quick he can get in one shot from his gun before Otomo knocks it flying from his hand. From then on it's down to bare-knuckle basics.







ibly well-animated), avoiding return fire and crashing into the skyscrapers or the ground. It's the segment that least feels as if it belongs in the game, mainly because without having seen it on film it's hard to accept Robocop flying through the air like some tin-plated Superman. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's an excuse for some spin-off toys.

Without doubt the most disappointing sequence is the hand-to-hand combat between Robocop and the android Ninja assassin. Due to the graphic complexity the action is rather sluggish, and Robocop's combat moves are distinctly limited. Robocop can simply walk around, duck and punch. Success is largely a matter of avoiding the Ninja's blows and timing the punch well, which given the sluggish movement and control response are not the easiest tasks in the world. However, there is a definite knack to it. Although the first couple of games reach unbelievable levels of frustration as the Ninja hacks you to the ground time after time, it doesn't take long to learn the never-fail tricks. Given that the final sequence in the game centres around this combat, it's a bit of a distinct anti-climax.

Amiga version

Top-notch all round. DID have done amazing things with the 3D, especially in the foot patrol sections. Sound is good too, with some suitably low-key tunes playing softly in the background to heighten the tension. Both conspire to generate an incredible amount of authentic Robocop atmosphere. Thanks to some excellent disc management the amount of disc swapping is virtually non-existent - nothing spoils the flow of a game, especially one as narrative based as this, than constant disc messages.

(Above right) Robocop dons his brand new Gyropack and flies to the aid of the besieged rebels. Note the new high-power cannon mounted on his right arm. Animated sequences such as this, which combine moody bitmapped graphics with subtly-coloured vector images, are used throughout the game to convey an authentic 'film-like' atmosphere.

DID are keen to make much of the fact that during the game the player is given several points where they can do things differently to the way Robo did it in the film and branch off on a new plot branch. Well, yes you can, but it's distinctly limited, generally resulting in the game ending abruptly or branching back into the main narrative almost immediately. For example, there's a pivotal point in the game where Robocop is ordered by the REHABs to kill some innocent people. Robocop can either rebel (as in the film) or follow orders. Do the first action and the game flows as normal, but do the second and the game ends abruptly with a Mediabreak report explaining that construction of Delta City is proceeding unopposed and the now-redundant Robocop has been decommissioned. Hardly going to get Lucasfilm or Sierra sweating, is it? Carping aside, it does add some longevity to the product, allowing the player to replay the game to see the alternate endings.

To be honest, Robocop 3 isn't quite as different as perhaps Ocean believes it to be. Like many other film tie-ins it's a blend of several game styles - a bit of shoot-'em-up, a bit of driving, a bit of beat-'em-up - with the simplistic nature of each element compensated for by the sheer variety on offer. However, the quality ground-breaking 3D presentation adds an incredible amount to the game, and the games are good fun, only let down by the limited thumping section. And frequently there are times in the game when you do actually feel like you're taking part in a film. Which, at the end of the day, is probably the best recommendation I can give. After all, isn't that what you're buying Robocop 3 for?

● David Upchurch

THE NAME REMAINS THE SAME...

It's all change for the new Robocop 3 film. New story angle (less violence, more techno-toys to increase kiddy appeal), new plot (well, it's always nice when they make the effort, isn't it, especially bearing in mind the carbon-copy depths that Die Hard 2 plumbed), new director (Fred 'The Monster Squad' Dekker replaces Irvin 'The Empire Strikes Back' Kershner, but that's no real surprise - Kershner replaced the original's Paul 'Total Recall' Verhoeven) and a new star.

Yup, that's right - a new star. Peter Weller is no longer the man in the iron suit. Apparently he couldn't face taking on the physically-exhausting role a third time. And let's face it, from an actin point of view it can't be the most satisfying job in the world trying to convey the whole panoply of complex human emotion via the mouth. So, for Robocop 3 the acting chores go to an formerly unknown American mime artist. There's very little information on him at the moment - even Orion's PR company don't know his name - though apparently his chin is identical to Weller's, so there shouldn't be any glaring continuity errors.

Audiences will be able to judge how good a job he's done when the film's released early next year.

RATINGS

Atmospheric, fast 3D.
Good 'film-like' presentation.
Unique twist on tie-in clichés.

Disappointing hand-to-hand combat.
Limited plot splitting.
Gameplay verges on the simplistic.

ROBOCOP 3 RATINGS

883 AMIGA RATING

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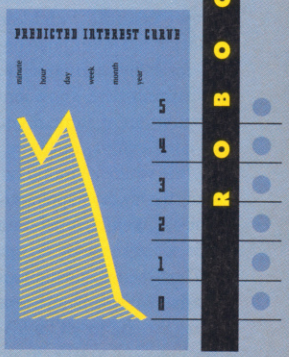
Knocks your socks off at first - you've never seen 3D as good as this before, or used as well. The Arcade Game allows the player to get a good taste of the game's major components, which in the case of the beat-'em-up section is probably not a good thing. Once that frustrating disappointment has passed the addictive hooks of completing the Movie Game start to dig in. It's doubtful, however, that it will take that long to polish off, and then the player is unlikely to return. The games, though fun in the framework of the Movie Game, lack sufficient depth to really pull you back time after time. And who wants to watch the same film over and over again?



Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean
Developer Probe Software
Price £25.99

SMASH TV

On with the body count! *This* is how games should be. If you thought some of the games in your software collection were violent, gory or brutal - think again. Smash TV is the most rollicking, most rucking, balls-out festival of carnage ever to grace a com-

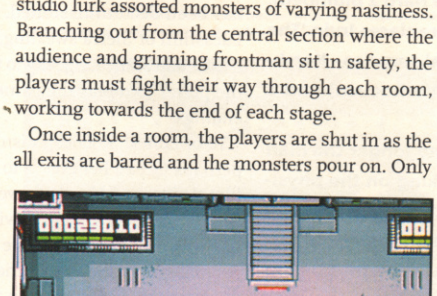
puter screen. And it's a scream. Converted by Probe Software from Williams' fantastically popular coin-op, Smash TV is based around a futuristic game show best described as *It's a Knockout* on PCP. Contestants either individually or as a team explore an enormous maze of rooms, collecting cash and goods prizes. Their progress is hampered, not by silly men in gorilla costumes throwing custard pies or trying to knock them off the slippery log with a water cannon, but by armies of zombies and mechanoid killing machines.

Hosted by an impossibly annoying gleamy-toothed frontman, the show entertains the braindead population of some dismal future culture. Like a twisted extension of the good old USA, this is a culture where all moral values have been destroyed. Only the tawdry trappings of success such as material goods, wealth and fame mean anything in this society.

The desensitised audience demands increasingly dramatic and thrilling television, while the contestants seize the chance of their 15 seconds of fame by the neck, willing to take on any odds and risk anything in the hope of becoming overnight TV stars.

Deep within the many rooms of the sprawling TV studio lurk assorted monsters of varying nastiness. Branching out from the central section where the audience and grinning frontman sit in safety, the players must fight their way through each room, working towards the end of each stage.

Once inside a room, the players are shut in as the all exits are barred and the monsters pour on. Only once the requisite number of creatures has been dispatched will the exits open and the players allowed to progress to the next stage. Depending on how brave or skillful the players feel, they can opt to either play straight through the level via the shortest route or clear each room and go for bigger prizes found in the bonus rooms.



The zombie hordes move around in deadly packs, and players (like this one) who insist on facing the wrong way and not firing much will have absolutely no success.

Everyone knows, however, that the score really isn't what games like Smash TV are all about. While it's interesting enough to note how many luxurious toasters and handy luggage sets are being amassed as wave upon wave of mutant cannon fodder bite the big one, it's the determination to see what the next section holds which will drive players ever onward and will keep them coming back for more even when they feel they've reached combat saturation point.

Let there be no doubt about it, Smash TV works best as a two-player game. In fact, that's a bit of an understatement. As a one player game it's something of a flop. This is no fault of the conversion. Quite the reverse. The coin-op was always far more enjoyable with a second gunner to scream at and criticise, and the same is true of the home versions. Facing wave after wave of zombies is excellent fun when there's a human comrade watching your back and bailing you out of the tight spots, but to be honest, when a single player is on his own it can get a bit boring.

In the initial stages, the bulk of the monsters needing shooting are fat baldy thugs wielding baseball bats and wearing an assortment of brightly coloured jerseys. At this early stage, none of the enemies faced are particularly tough. It's the sheer number of assailants which eventually grind the players down. As the bodies are piling up, and the ammunition for one of the many powered-up weapons is running

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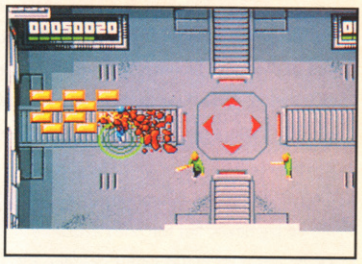
And this is where the trouble begins. The main studio sits at the centre of the play arena with the ever-more deadly rooms radiating around the edge. Note the screaming frontman. Once you've battled through to the very end of the game, it's HIM who you must defeat in order to swan off with an extra hot water bottle or something.



If you thought some of the titles in your games collection were violent, gory or brutal - think again.

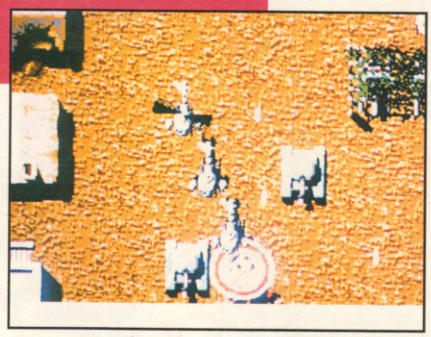
low, careless players may well find themselves cornered and simply over-run. As the monsters flood into the room through first one entrance, then another, then another, a corner of the room which was previously reasonably safe can turn into a deathtrap in a matter of seconds. It's this continual, relentless demand on the players' reactions which makes Smash TV such an addictive game.

Unusually for an arcade blast, Smash TV comes with a wealth of control options, offering even the most particular player happiness on the joystick front. For a kick off, one or two players can play. And each can opt to either use one or two joysticks. The former necessitates some keyboard tapping but doesn't require the purchase of joystick-splitters. The latter, while incurring a reasonable outlay (around £10) enables the players to use one stick for movement and another to direct their fire. In this mode, no fire-buttons are needed and surprisingly, it's nowhere near as irritating trying to deal with two joysticks as you may imagine.

The obvious advantage of the latter setup, as any Smash TV player will know, is that it isn't necessary to fire in the direction of travel. Simply, this means that the players can run away from a tight situation and continue to fire back into the crowd of pursuing monsters. Like some Hammer-Horror Pied Piper, the player can circle most of the early screens working both sticks in unison, leading the ever- growing horde to their deaths.

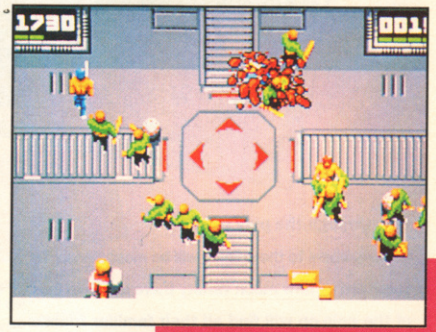
In fact, rather than simply being a handy novelty, this is a vital element of the game. Smash TV just doesn't work using the first control method. Even though Probe have done their utmost to cater for players with only one stick, the continual need to hold down a key either locking the fire direction or toggling on the backwards-firing option is just too frustrating and distracting.

Two-player fun can still be had if only one stick each is available, though. By selecting a one-player game with two joysticks, a degree of the team-up comradeship is available as one player controls the movement and the other controls the firing direction of their joint on-screen persona. Far from being as useless as this sounds, it's actually most amusing. It demands some serious teamwork and compatibility between players, perhaps even more so than when each player is controlling a character of his own, since there's a strong element of competitiveness there as each player scrambles for the best prizes ▶84



personal feel. Perhaps because you can almost single out particularly irritating monsters and pick them off in whichever way you prefer, Smash beats *SWIV* on this front.

However, *SWIV* manages to retain its crown as Arcade Blast Benchmark by simply having a touch more class. Smash's ready ruggedness is occasionally just a touch too rugged and primary.



compare & contrast

Smash TV, while distinct in style, has most in common with Storm's excellent *SWIV*, simply because is such an honest-to-God blaster. In both titles, game-slowing frills are non existent, and all the efforts have been concentrated on providing a continual adrenalin boost for players. Just as *SWIV* gives a slightly evil feeling of satisfaction as the enemy helicopters and tanks explode, so Smash TV delivers similar thrills albeit on a more close-quarters,

POWER-UP EXTREME!

As the levels of Smash TV turn it from simply one of the most bloodthirstily violent games of all time into something *really* gory, so the number of extra weapons available for collection increases.

Now, obviously, power-ups in arcade games are no big news, but the ones available in Smash TV do actually make some genuine difference to the way the game is played.

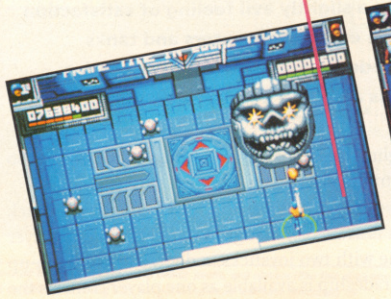
In fact, the power-ups become so sought after, often providing the only survival route through a particularly perilous stage, than players will end up fighting over who needs a particular weapon more. Again, this is where the team elements of Smash come to the fore, as it certainly isn't the case that a continual stream of extra weapons will flow through the play area.

Newcomers to the coin-op will be most pleasantly surprised by how much variety there is, while fans of the coin-op will find all their familiar friends faithfully reproduced.

There's absolutely no way on this earth that any of the end-of-level bad guys will cave in under anything less than an absolute barrage of powered-up fire. So take a glance at our handy guide and choose the gun that's right for you.

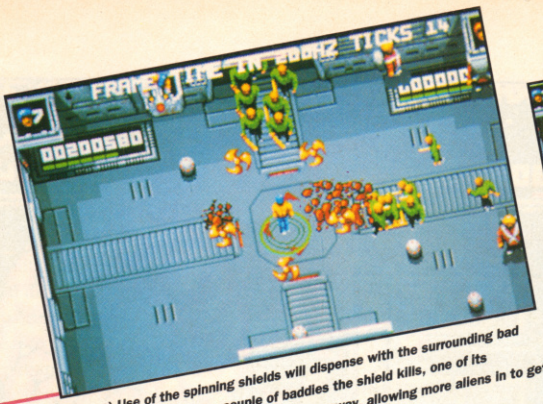
(Above left) One of the less interesting power-ups; the Three-way fire. However dull it may look, though, the three-way will clear a wide spread of aliens in just a trice.

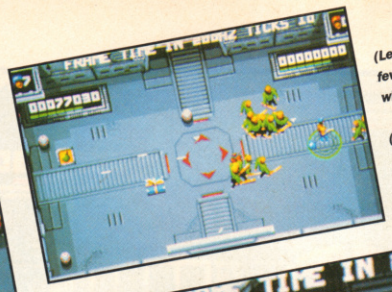
(Above right) The green grenades fire out in a wobbly pattern which is surprisingly effective against groups of aliens approaching in a disorganised bunch. They destroy whichever object they hit first.



(Above left) The incredible bouncing football weapon is handy for most situations, especially when being pursued into a corner, since the bombs bounce off walls and back into the enemy.

(Above right) The rapid-fire rocket launcher will do a more clinical job than that of the normal rifle.

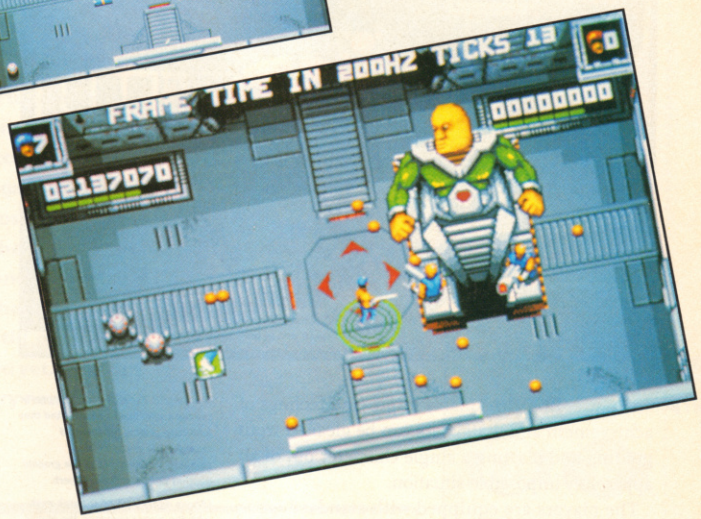




(Left) The spinning blue orb will keep a few rather weedy opponents at bay for a while.

(Below) Most useful when being pursued by an enormous skinhead in a tank - some speed-up trainers!

(Above) Use of the spinning shields will dispense with the surrounding bad guys. However, for every couple of baddies the shield kills, one of its constituent spinning blades will be eaten away, allowing more aliens in to get you.

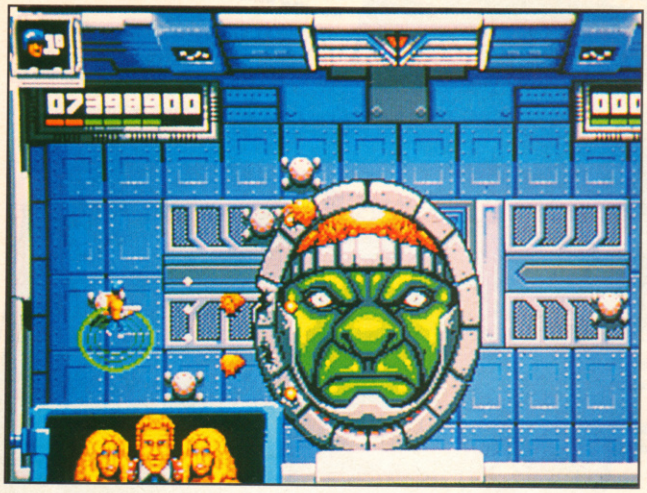


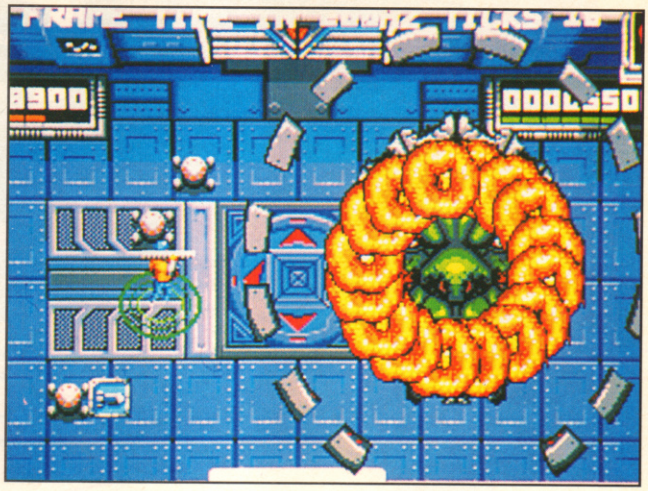
Definitely boasting one of the highest body counts for a very long time, Smash TV also bestows upon the player some seriously devastating weapons. However, no-one can call themselves a decent Smash player unless they have a complete working knowledge of all the available weaponry. So what better way to learn about the hardware than with our step-by-step guide?

(Left) The symbol everyone dreams of - an extra-life icon. Although each new stage fills up the player's reserves of lives to an appropriate level, an extra never goes amiss.

(Above left) Some levels are completely impossible without making maximum use of the shield. Brave players should simply turn and walk into their assailants at this stage.

(Left) Just one foot on one of the Smart Bomb and every meanie on the screen gets atomized.





81▶ and power-ups. Reasonably impressive feelings of achievement and mateyness can be gleaned from guiding and blasting a single character out of an apparently impossible situation.

The players are equipped with standard issue beginners' rifles at the start of the game and can collect a selection of power-ups as they progress. To be frank, the chances of making any progress through the later stages without some serious firepower are slim. These appear randomly, and it can be a terminally nerve-wracking experience barely holding off the rampant hordes and praying for a tableturning power-up to pop up.

By far the most effective 'extras' available are the smart bomb (a little yellow rocket symbol) which destroys all monsters on screen when touched, and the invulnerability-awarding shield, which is also activated as the player enters the level with a new life to give him a couple of seconds mutie-immunity. When shielded, the player can simply walk through all the monsters, killing them with a single touch. Shields, like so many things, don't last for long and players should be warned against running too casually into a mass of aliens, lest their shield conk out while in the midst of a hostile zone.

Also best avoided are the numerous mines which litter the floors of the arena. Stepping on one of these babies will kill the player outright with a massive explosion, sending out eyeballs and shoes in all directions. The mines are particularly common in the bonus rooms. These chambers which are optionally entered and can be skipped by players simply out to kill the end-of-level bad guys, are absolutely littered with goods and cash. All the players have to do to collect the wares is run over them. However, each bonus room comes complete with hundreds of monsters in varying attack patterns. Some serious calculation is necessary if the player is to correctly decide whether it's worth his while risking death for a couple of suitcases and a kettle.

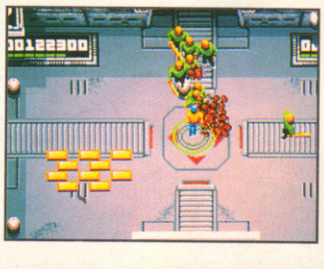
(Above left) Facing off against one of the big end-of level baddies. And they just keep getting meaner and meaner! One of the flawless elements of Smash TV is the graphic content and animation. Superb.

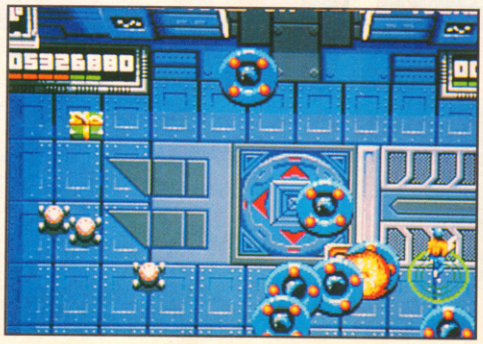
(Above right) Yes! After much work with the rocket launcher, the player triumphs and is rewarded with a satisfying enemy-death sequence.

(Below) Players who have recently died and are restored to the game are protected from attack for a few seconds with their shield. This allows efficient killing sprees for those brave enough to walk into the enemy troops.

(Bottom left) Later levels throw up more diverse threats to the players' health.

(Bottom right) And now it's getting really bizarre! Snakes'n'tanks will do away with players in a trice. Just as well this level begins with a brace of FIFTEEN lives for each player!





TOTAL CONTROL

Phew! Joysticks, eh? Smash TV, to the uninitiated, has a rather complex control setup. But hey! All the options are simply there for your convenience. So let's examine them in full. I'm confident that we can find one to suit Sir's tastes:

SINGLE STICK OPTIONS:

- **The joystick guides the character around the screen, and FIRE blasts in whichever way he's facing.**
- **The right Amiga key locks the firing in the current direction, where it will stay until the FIRE button is released.**
- **The right ALT key switches firing to the opposite of the current movement direction, allowing the player to shoot backwards. Again, until the FIRE button is released.**
- **All the opposites (left keys instead of right) work for the second player.**

DUAL STICK OPTIONS:

- **Owners should, without hesitation, purchase themselves a joystick splitter, if for no other reason than to appreciate the full glory of Smash TV as it was intended. Just slot the little baby into the parallel port in the back of your machine, connect a brace of four joysticks and prepare yourself for action!**
- **The left stick governs movement and the right governs firing. This facilitates maximum killing and movement.**

Smash TV demands continual damage assessment and threat prioritising. It's rarely one foe which kills a player. Most of the time a player comes a cropper just by getting cornered or beaten down by the bat-wielding thugs. Every second the player must decide from which direction the most virulent enemy threat is coming, and fight it. The upshot of this is continual direction changing and non-stop firing. An absolutely iron-clad rule is to never, ever stand still for more than a second.

Graphic detail is, of course, vital if a game like this is to have any form of realism. Producing a realistic effect of hundreds and hundreds of monsters buying the farm is arguably much more difficult than depicting one or two going down in individual style. In this case, Probe have opted to throw up rather uninspiring splodges of blood every time a bad guy gets hit. Hardly the most exciting visual treat, but an understandable compromise in the light of the sheer number of animations which have to be stored. For the most part, though, the visuals are most impressive with the thousands of monsters swarming around the screen swinging their baseball bats, dozens of Mr Shrapnels (who, true to his name, trundles around then explodes into shards of flying metal) milling around and stacks of the frontman's henchmen squeaking around in open-top tanks firing flamethrowers at the hapless contestants.

And as the body count rises, it's all too tempting to find yourself nodding and muttering and forgetting to blink and shouting through your teeth about killing. In fact, collecting one of the power-up weapons after a lengthy period of relative cowardice (very often the most successful players are those who spend most of their time going backwards) and being able to wreak apocalyptic, searing punishment on the mutant pursuers is one of the most satisfying elements in any game I've recently seen.

The biggest criticism that I can aim at Smash TV is that the other side of the instant-appeal coin is long-term tedium. It's a shaky bet that players will necessarily return to a game which becomes so difficult in the later stages, no matter how determined they may be at the outset to seek and destroy every end-of-level monster. The heroic feel of narrowly completing the amazingly complex levels may well prove to be enough of a spur to keep some coming back for more, but not that many.

That, however, is pretty much a money and choc-ice scenario. Those who are fond of the Smash TV coin-op are unlikely to be bothered by such trifles as long-term appeal. Instead, they'll be happy playing one of the best coin-op conversions to emerge from the Ocean stable.

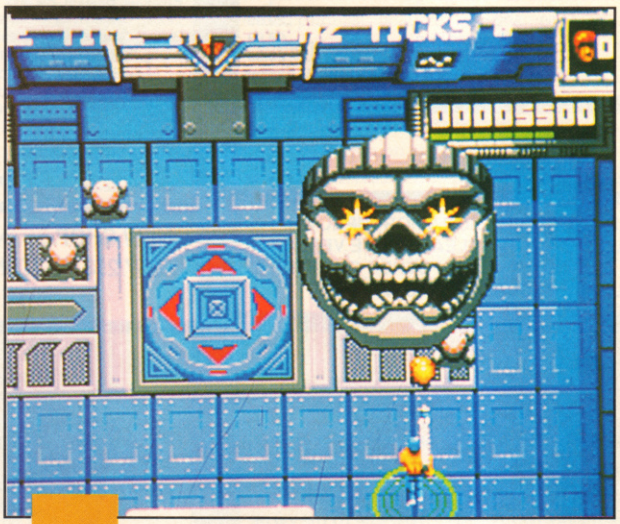
● Jim Douglas

(right) Smash TV! Do you have the necessary "stones" to survive the futuristic battle for cash?

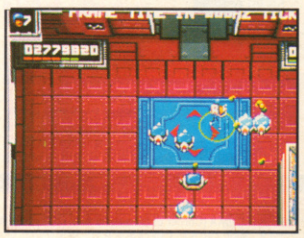
(Below) Nearly there... the monster weakens... and just when you thought he was dead - he keeps going! If anything the monsters are rather too tough and can occasionally end up with players simply astonished at how much punishment the baddies can take.

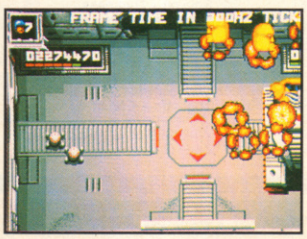
Amiga Version

Amiga owners are fortunate enough to enjoy perhaps one of the finest conversions of a coin-op in ages. Graphically pleasing if not exactly elegant, with more action than you could wave the most rapid-firing stick at, the no-nonsense feel of the original has been most adequately captured. And despite the sizable levels, disk-access time has been kept refreshingly low. The verdict is still out on the other versions, as they ain't finished yet. Look out for updates in the Reviews DIrectory next month.



Those fond of the coin-op are unlikely to be bothered with long-term appeal. Instead, they will be instantly grafitied by one of Ocean's finest conversions for years.





RATINGS

Excellent two-player action	Not too hot played solo
Phenomenal body count	Incredibly difficult
Variety of weapons	Not very 'deep'

895 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	2	7	8

Okay, okay. So it's not exactly the most cerebral game in the world. But who cares? It does what it does and it does it well enough to sit neatly alongside *Tetris, Zany Golf* and *Defender;* games which when described to people sound absolutely rubbish but when played are simply wonderful. Even with no particular desire to zoom through to the later levels, therapeutic relaxation is on tap as the endlessly-murderable zombie hordes walk into the firing line. Class. However, without wishing to sound too square, it is unlikely to hold the interest any longer than the coin-op. And are you still playing that?

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

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SMASH TV RATINGS

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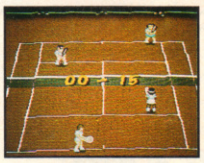
SUPER TENNIS



(Top) Doubles action in Super Tennis - two players can team up to battle it out against a computer-controlled pairing.

(Above) A detailed stat screen pops up between sets and after the match, showing who did what, when, why and how.

Anyone for tennis? Of course there is! There only has to be a bit of it on the telly to get every able-bodied Englishman fighting for a court down at their local club. And though most of us are pretty hopeless when it actually comes to playing, deep down we're all Agassis at heart - there's nothing like the good hard 'thock' of racket connecting with ball, and the smell of chalkdust in the morning to get the blood racing. Of course the experience has been simulated on computer umpteen times over the years - UbiSoft's *Pro Tennis Tour* and Palace's *International 3D Tennis* being the most notable efforts - but it has to be said that none of them could even dare to compare to the utter excellence of this FamiCom effort from Tonkin House.

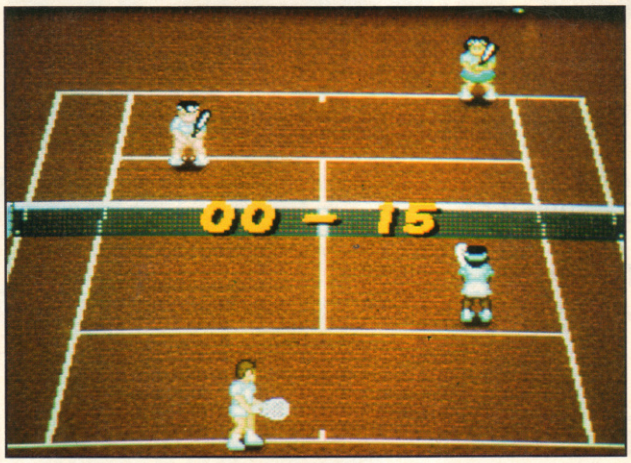
In the tradition of almost all Japanese sports sims, Super Tennis is much more arcadey and simplistic than the traditionally more sophisticated computer interpretations. The viewpoint is the same favoured by most Tennis coin-ops, as well as that adopted by TV coverage of the real thing. What's most impressive about the game becomes apparent as soon as you pick up the joypad - the lack of any instructions (or at least ones that don't read like a Chinese takeaway menu) proved no problem at all. The tennis action is so instinctive that the full array of shots can be mastered and proficient play achieved literally within minutes.

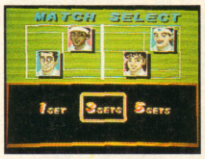
It's all down to the cleverness of the control mode, which incorporates the same kind of context-sensitivity that's proved so successful in the beat 'em-up genre lately. Four basic shots are available - a forehand, backhand, lob and a gentle slice. Each shot has its own button, so there's no complex directions or combinations of controls to worry about, and - here's the clever bit - the type of shot each button produces changes depending on the situation. If the player reaches an incoming lob before it bounces, the standard forehand shot transforms into a devastating smash. Likewise, if you're playing at the net and your opponent is stranded on the baseline, the same shot becomes a dainty tap which sends the ball trickling over the net, making it almost impossible to reach. It's all very clever stuff, and because it's all handled automatically, even absolute beginners can produce some stunning - and very satisfying - shots.

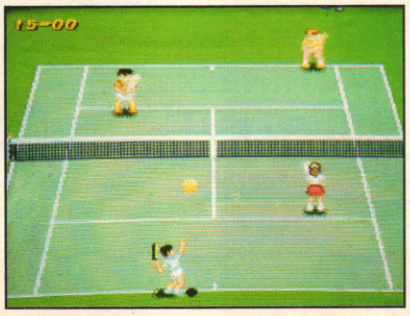
This all happens with traditional FamiCom fluidity, and it's remarkable how authentic Super Tennis really is, given its simplicity. The cutesy characters (which are loosely based on real pros) work well, with the women being naturally less powerful than the men. Mixed games can be played, and it's often necessary to play against a girl in one-player mode to provide a handicap, such is the computer player's proficiency. In addition to singles play, a variety of doubles modes are available (players can compete against each other with computer partners or team up together to take on computerised pairings) and there's a tournament option, where the player travels the international circuit in search of that elusive world title.

There's no doubt that Super Tennis is a class act - it's undoubtedly the most playable adaptation of the sport ever seen on any format. In one-player mode, however, it's likely to prove a little limiting due to the somewhat vexing skill of some of the more proficient opponents. With two players though, there's nothing to beat it. So go halves with a mate and get a copy today.

● **Gary Whitta**







(Top) Three types of court, with varying speeds are available for clay. Good old grass is the favourite, although tougher players may prefer cement or clay, as shown here.

(Above) Matches can be 1, 3 or 5 sets long, regardless of the players' sexes.

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ACE Trail Blazer

Superb control mode.
Excellent sonics.
Two-player is awesome.

Computer opponent is a little tough.
Not many options for single players

920 FAMICOM RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	2	8	9

Ultra-instinctive control makes Super Tennis incredibly easy to learn - although mastery won't be achieved for quite a while. The tournament option helps drag out one-player longevity, and there's no chance of the two-player game ever becoming boring. Graphically it's fine, and the sampled FX and music are top-notch. Loads of little touches (such as the players throwing their rackets to the ground and shouting "Shit!" after losing a point) provide a big, fresh, glistening cherry on an already lovely-tasting trifle.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

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KLAX

MEGAGRAFIX

Though people may sneer at the commercial side of the games industry, and its tendency to churn out cynical clones of whatever the hot product of the moment may be, every now and again such pinstripe-orientated market strategy leads to a game that's actually as good as the game that inspired it. Klax is the perfect example. Atari Games makes no bones about the fact that Klax was conceived as an attempt to jump onto the Tetris bandwagon, by appealing to the same "new breed" of cerebral arcade gamers. There had been attempts before, the most notable being the mediocre Block Out, but Klax succeeded where so many others had failed because it went about things the right way - rather than trying to just copy Tetris or present the same game in a different way, Klax based an original game around Tetris' basic qualities. The formula certainly seemed to work, as it won a huge arcade following in the States and has since been converted to just about every home format imaginable - even the monochrome GameBoy!

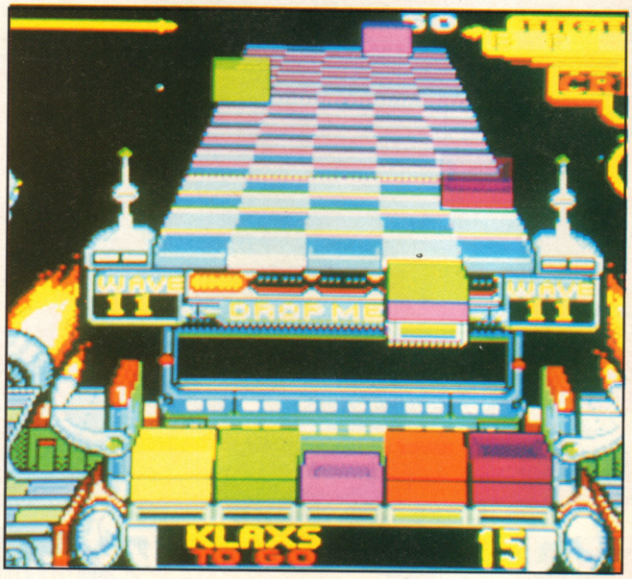
The Megadrive is the latest machine to be blessed with this little gem, and it's arguably produced the best home version so far. Like Tetris, the game is theoretically so simple it can be explained on the back of a postage stamp - but things aren't quite so cut and dried in practice. Coloured tiles travel down the length of a long table-like affair, flipping over and over as they go, towards the player's paddle at the near end. The tiles travel in any of five lanes, and by positioning the paddle under them as they fall off the edge of the table, they can be caught and held. Points are scored by flipping the tiles, in turn, from the paddle and into any of five "bins" below, where they stack up, one on top of another. Actually, you won't get many points by doing that alone - the trick is to stack them in such a way that three tiles of the same colour form a line horizontally, vertically and diagonally. A line like this is called a Klax, and the three tiles involved disappear when one is scored.

The game is wave-based, with the player being charged to perform a certain task - get 20 diagonal Klaxes, survive an onslaught of 75 titles, score at least 10,000 points and so on. As the waves continue, the tasks get tougher and the tiles get faster. The player bites the dust if he drops too many tiles (they fall into oblivion if the paddle isn't under them when they reach the end of the table) or the five bins fill up with tiles - the equivalent of hitting the top of the screen in Tetris.

It all sounds a bit too simple to be playable - a bit like animated Tic-Tac-Toe - but the gameplay actually runs a lot deeper than that. The tiles in the bins are affected by gravity, so when a Klax is created and tiles disappear, any others that were above them drop down accordingly. This means there are no embarrassing floating blocks a la Tetris - and allows for smart players to to set up plays that cause chain reactions - one Klax causing another, which causes another and so on. Because up to five tiles can be stacked on the player's paddle, complex formations and strategies can be devised - something which the game encourages by offering giant bonuses and level warps for clever play. In addition there are elements such as the flashing "wild card" tile (which acts as all colours at the same time) and the ability to flick tiles, temporarily, back onto the table to may way for other, more urgent colours. The scope for strategy and tactical play is far, far greater than Tetris, or indeed any other game of this type, and that's what makes it so compulsive. Many gamers may find Klax a bit frustrating because it requires much more tactical thought and forward planning than the more immediate Tetris, but the rewards are there for players willing to learn the tricks and strategies involved through practice.

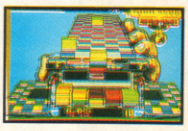
Klax is played over a variety of bizarre backdrops, from a giant hand which holds the play area, to a roaring spaceship and ,in this case, a car park!

(Below) Before each wave, a screen tells the player what task he must perform - in this case, get 15 Klaxes of any kind. If he's lucky, there may also be a special hint.



Given the low quality of much of today's Sega software, Megadrive owners should snap up this glistening opportunity to slot some real gameplay in their machine. Klax is an unadulterated masterpiece of game design, and supremely playable to boot. Go to it!

● Gary Whitta



Klax allows two modes of screen presentation. There's a standard, slim mode, and a special panoramic version with extra-chunky graphics that take up the entire screen. Wicked!

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Brilliantly compulsive.
Waves set challenging tasks.
Lots of scope for tactical play.

Maybe too complex for many gamers.
Annoying colour mix-ups.

915 MEGADRIVE RATING

G 8 IQ 7 A 6 FF 9

Klax is a very pretty game indeed, and the wealth of options available mean that this is probably the best and most accessible home version of the lot. You can even change the tile colours! The only small criticism is that there are two types of green tile which are so alike (one is ever-so-slightly darker than the other) that it's difficult to tell them apart in the heat of play - and a single mistake of that kind is enough to blow an entire game. Apart from that, everything is fine and dandy - even the coin-op's original sampled sound is in there. Top notch!

KLAX RATINGS

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SUPER GHOULS N'GHOSTS

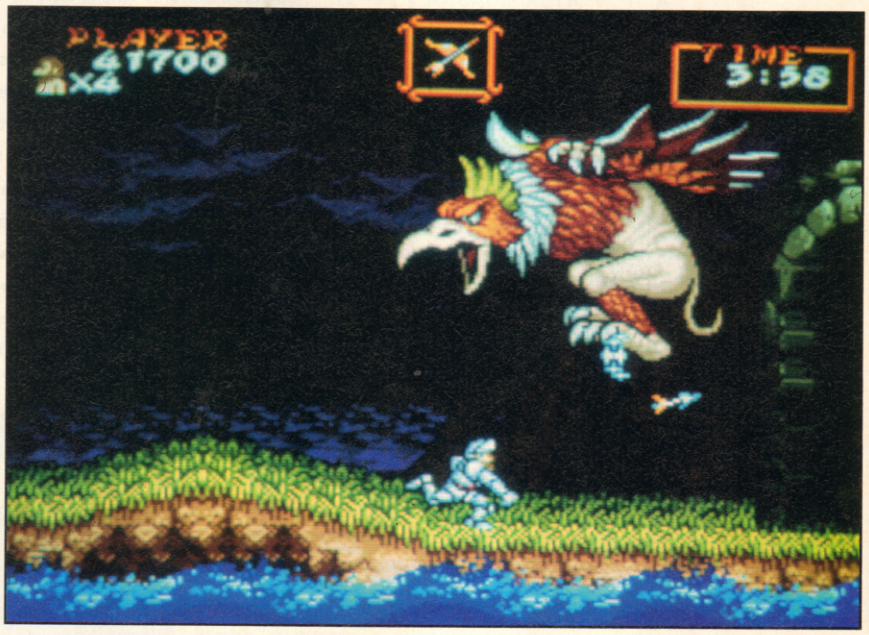
There's an old saying "Soup boiled, soup spoiled". Unfortunately that has no relevance here. However another, "Lucky at cards, unlucky in love", does. Why? Because if it's true then I hope I never face Sir Arthur Lancelittle across a poker table. The plucky warrior with the passion for boxer shorts forever seems to be on the verge of 'getting it on' with his beloved Princess only to have a giant demon crash the party and whisk her away to a castle hideaway. Frustrating? You bet. No wonder Arthur wears loose-fitting underwear.

Arthur, despite or maybe because of his lack of success with the ladies, is a bit of a celeb. He's appeared twice in the arcades, once in *Ghosts n' Goblins* and more recently in the fantastic sequel *Ghouls n' Ghosts*. The two games have been converted with far more than average success onto just about every computer and console format imaginable. Except, alas, the Super FamiCom.

Until now. When CapCom announced the release of Super Ghouls n' Ghosts on the FamiCom, many wondered how the company was going to improve on the flawlessly definitive Megadrive coin-op conversion. Well, know we know.

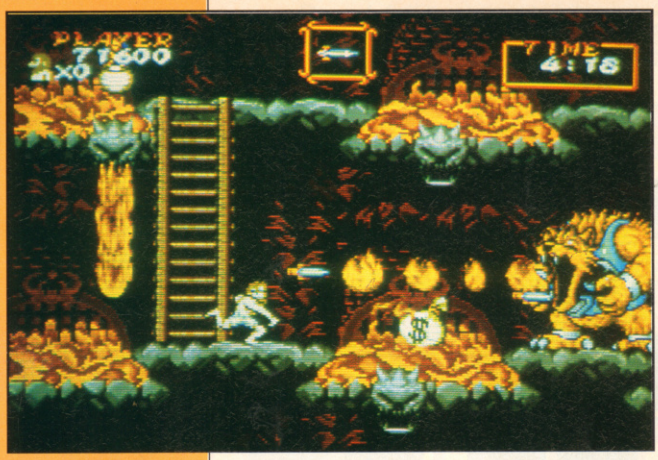
On powering up the cart, SGn'G appears to have precious little 'Super' about it. There's a dull intro relating the usual story kidnapped love that shows off the FamiCom's background-expanding trick to the full (again - yawn). As usual there's a scrolling preview map of the perils that lie ahead and then it's into the first level.

The setting is a ramshackle graveyard, and Arthur must run and jump over all manner of obstacles while lobbing a lance in the fizzogs of the shambling zombies that rise from the wet earth and make a beeline for him. Some of the freaks carry pots containing such goodies as bonuses and power-up weapons and armour. It's a bit like *Ghouls n' Ghosts*. And *Ghosts n' Goblins*, for that matter.

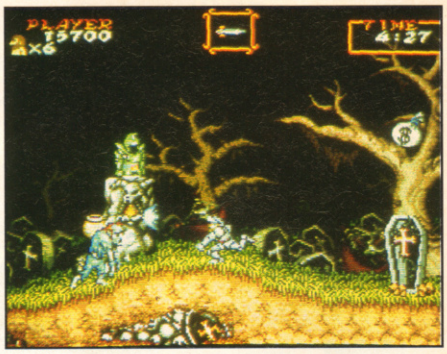


In fact, the over-riding feeling, despite wondrous playability and a couple of new features (notably the strange-looking double jump whereby Arthur can make a second leap whilst still in mid-air), is very much one of *déja vu*. Surely CapCom hasn't cynically produced a slightly enhanced version of the coin-op to cash in on the giant pool of games-hungry FamiCom owners?

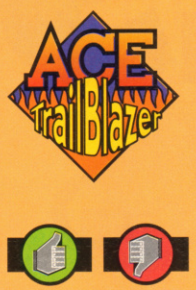
(Top) Forget Sesame Street. This Big Bird spells only one thing - T.R.O.U.B.L.E. Fortunately this guardian to the end of Level 1 is not too hard to kill, just keep plugging away at the FIRE button while keeping well back out of the reach of its lunge.
(Above left and right) Look out - surf's up! Get caught on the low ground midway through the first level and you can 'wave' (ho-ho!) goodbye to one of your lives.



(Left) Level 3 and things are starting to hot up. Deadly firepits play host to homing fire nymphs, streams of lava spew from the mouths of statues and giant werewolves gob flames. Arthur had better make sure he's wearing his asbestos boxers for this level.



(Bottom) Arthur is halfway to completing his quest, and things start taking a distinctly weird turn as he scales stony towers. While Arthur remains in the centre of the screen, the tower rotates to follow his progress (an effect similar to that seen in Nebulus 2). Stunning.



Impossibly addictive gameplay.

Wouldn't look out of place in an arcade.

Eight long-lasting levels.

Difficulty setting can be a little daunting.

Occasional slowing in action.

FAMICOM RATING **915**

G	IQ	A	FF
10	4	10	10

Initial mild disappointment gives way to sheer delight at the unbelievably huge range of fresh new challenges awaiting the jaded Gn'G player. The gameplay concept (run, jump and shoot) may be an old one, but it's the software equivalent of a 'hardy perennial'. As long as it's done well, the game can't fail. And CapCom have done it very well indeed. SGn'G is tough but rarely frustrating, and will keep you coming back again and again until it's been cracked. And even then, there's enjoyment to be had from returning and trying to do things that bit better. A classic.

GHOULS N' GHOSTS RATINGS

Thankfully, those initial impressions couldn't be more wrong. The player need only get beyond the first few screens to realise that actually this is far more than just some half-baked *Gn'G+*, it's a completely new game. Although the levels share some of the themes and settings of its illustrious predecessors, the tasks and challenges are all new and wonderfully varied. One minute Arthur's avoiding showers of skulls from giant stone monoliths, the next he's clambering on top of a stone pillar to avoid being washed away by a giant tidal wave, then he's dodging careening trolleys of flame - and this is all on the first level alone!

Later levels feature such unique challenges as *Nebulus*-style rotating towers to scale, disorientation-inducing rotating mazes to navigate, giant avalanches to avoid, tentacles of ice thrusting from the snowy ground and, of course, endless processions of the Undead to dispatch.

Control over Arthur is superb, and the FamiCom's well-designed joypad makes it easy to jump and fire at the same time (often an essential requirement). The graphics and sound are marvellous throughout - the ice world in particular is quite breathtakingly beautiful. If you stuck the FamiCom and this cart in a fancy cabinet with a big monitor then it would easily take money in the arcades.

But as seems to be a common problem with Nintendo's supposed 'wonder' console, there's some bad slowing when several large sprites are on-screen, though these occurrences are rare and don't detract from the top-notch gameplay. In fact, when facing off against some of the tougher monsters the slower pace is a positive advantage.

SGn'G is simply a superb game, and fully lives up to the high expectations generated by the early preview shots. In fact, I would say it's the next essential purchase after *Super Mario*. But then I'm biased because I've played the game. And I'd suggest you do the same - pronto.

● **David Upchurch**

ARMOUR BELIEVER

Arthur starts his quest clad in the latest designer armour. It affords him a little protection from the evil ones but not much - one touch and it falls off, leaving Arthur naked save for a pair of spotted boxers! This is when Arthur's really in trouble, because all it takes is one more hit from the baddies and he'll jump out of his skin - literally!

Fortunately there are spare suits of armour to be found if Arthur looks carefully, and even some magic ones. These come in two 'flavours', green and gold. The green armour may not be the most fashionable suit to be seen in but its effects more than make up for this - it turns Arthur's down-to-earth weapons into magical counterparts. Lances become fizzing lightning bolts, knives become homing fireballs, axes become whirling flameblades. But although far more powerful, the firepaths of these magical missiles can be a little unpredictable at times. The gold armour is smarter in every sense. It allows Arthur to build up a super super weapon by holding down FIRE (as in *R-Type*). Devastating against the end-of-level meanies.

Special thanks to Shekhana Consoles (081 340 8565) for the loan of this review cartridge.

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MEGADRIVE

WRESTLE WAR

Occasionally satisfying to play. Although not very often.

Awful player control.

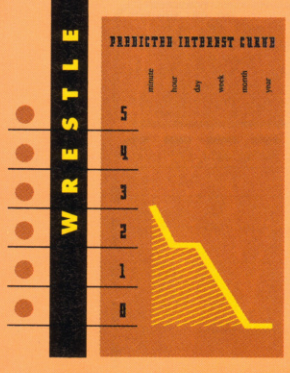
Poor graphic representation.

Frustrating gameplay.

MEGADRIVE RATING **635**

G	IQ	A	FF
7	2	4	5

Although not a total write-off in the gameplay stakes, Wrestle War is sufficiently frustrating to put most people off and - particularly annoying, this - it occasionally offers little glimpses of playability, which flitter away as quickly as they appeared. That's the most annoying part about it. There is little consolation in the aesthetic stakes. The character animation is poor, and because the ring itself hasn't been drawn very well, the camera angle frequently switches round to keep the combatants in view - most confusing. Sound is kept to a minimum, with the odd bit of speech and typical white-noise crowd sounds. Not one to impress your mates with - if they're WWF fans and you show them this, you'll become an



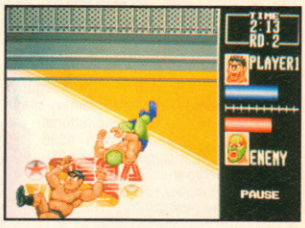
Over the last year Sky Television has proved, all too distressingly, just how trend-led and impressionable the young British public really is. First it was The Simpsons - a show that has achieved legendary status, particularly among the shellsuit fraternity, even though the tiny percentage of the population that are equipped with a satellite dish have actually seen the show. Now the same thing is happening, on an equally grand scale, all over again. The faces of Hulk Hogan, Sergeant Slaughter, the Bushwhackers, the Undertaker, Legion of Doom and countless other World Wrestling Federation "superstars" are adorning T-shirts, posters and sticker albums up and down the land - yet most of the Hulkster's young fans have never even seen him in action!

The WWF craze is going to get bigger before it goes away - as Ocean recognises, having snapped up the official rights. Sega's game, while not boasting any such trendy licence, has undoubtedly been released to cash in on the craze all the same. It's a pretty uninspired effort, casting the player as up-and-coming grappler Bruce Blade who must battle his way to to the top of the pro wrestling world. Doing so means taking on eight vicious computer-controlled bad guys of increasing strength and skill. In theory it sounds like a right laugh, and it looks very playable indeed - but once you get down to the business of actually wrestling, things go drastically down hill.

Effort has been made to keep control as simple as possible - there's a basic punch and a kick, and when the two wrestlers grapple, it's down to furious high-speed button pummelling to see who will get the better hold. From then on various combinations of directions and buttons produce the moves, which include clotheslines, body slams, pile drivers, drop kicks, suplexes and so on. Again, theoretically it sounds simple enough, but what spoils this otherwise acceptable system is that the rapid button-tapping that's necessary to get a hold of your opponent is so demanding that it's almost impossible to execute any of the more elaborate moves. It always seems that, no matter how fast you hammer away at that button, the computer opponent almost always gets the upper hand, and that's no fun at all. If it was just that little bit easier, it would be a lot of fun. As it is, it's just frustrating, and very hard on the fingers.

In true wrestling style, the combat takes place outside the ring as well as in. Out here on the floor, a fighter can pick up a chair and use it to batter his opponent with.

The one saving grace is a two player mode, which is a damn sight more enjoyable because the opponents are much more equally matched. That, however, is little consolation for the downright inaccessibility of the main tournament game, where some of the later opponents are so strong it seems almost impossible to beat them. For some reason it remains compelling for a while - perhaps because something keeps telling you that it's your fault you keep losing and not the game's - but once that little phase passes, Wrestle War is liable to be relegated to the dusty bit at the back of the software shelf. If Sega's hoping to exploit the WWF craze with this one, it's going to be disappointed - kids are too selective to accept cheap imitations, otherwise they'd all be walking around in Tesco Tearaways instead of Reebok Pumps. Chances are the official WWF game, when it finally appears, will be a damn sight more playable anyway.



Bosh! Bang! Two of the more elaborate moves in action. In the top picture, Bruce Blade falls foul to a suplex at the hands of Nim Rod. But then he gets his own back, executing a perfect Drop Kick, flooring the Hulk Hogan lookalike. Hooray!

● **Gary Whitta**

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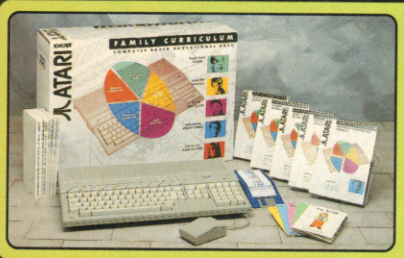

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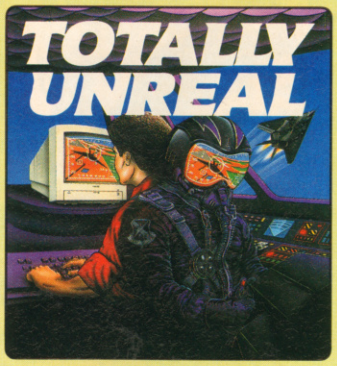

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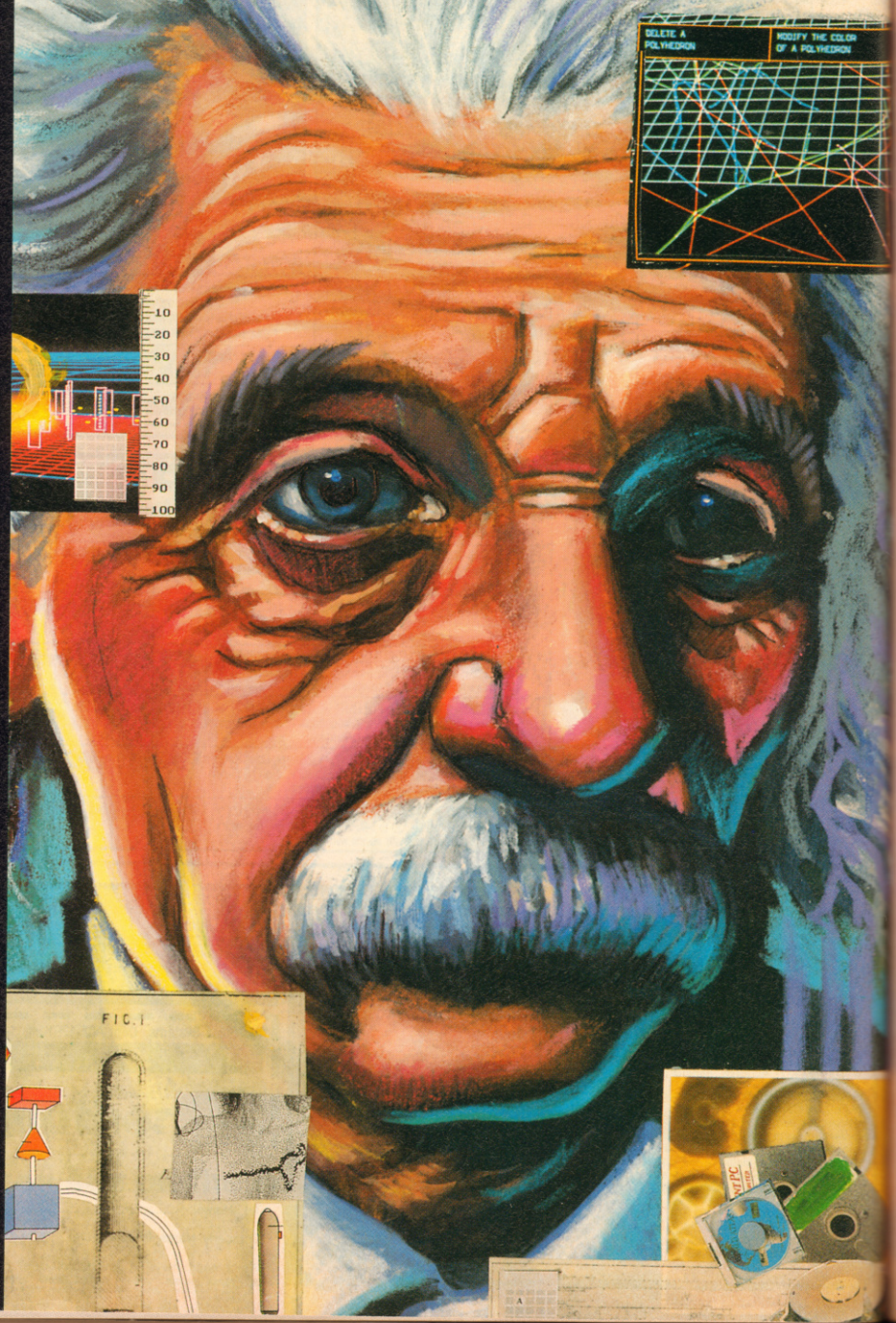

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reviews directory

Hooray! A hearty ACE welcome goes out to one and all who have managed to stick it out this far into the magazine. Stop your grinning and drop your linen, 'cause this is where it's all happening. The ACE Reviews Directory provides the definitive rundowns, not just on ALL the games software released in this merry month of November, but also on the vast majority of titles that are still available for your machine. If you can find it on a shelf in a software shop, you'll find it here! No kidding! Whereas most magazines' roundup sections are like an old-age pensioners' tea dance, the ACE Reviews Directory is the software equivalent of a major warehouse party rave, with enough Tic-Tacs and Lucozade for everybody. Acieeeeeed!

There's something for everybody in the ACE Directory - unlike certain other magazine's rather cynical roundup sections, the Directory isn't just a dumping ground for software that doesn't make the grade. You'll find everything from One-star disasters to Trailblazing classics, all co-habitating in perfect harmony - much like Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder. Each game featured in the Directory has been thoroughly played to death by ACE's band of gameplay experts, and awarded a star rating, from one (oh dear) to five (hooray!). You'll not find a more authoritative guide anywhere.

We hope that you'll find the ACE Reviews Directory an invaluable reference guide - maybe it will help you make your mind up about a game if you're a bit unsure, or tip you off about a little gem you never knew existed. Or maybe you're just after a damn good read. Whatever you want, the ACE Directory is for you. To assist you in this matter, all the games are listed in alphabetical order - and to further ensure that you have no trouble locating the game you're looking for, we've printed the alphabet for you here, so you can see what order the letters come in.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

New Releases:

Baby Jo
Captain Planet
Celtic Legends
Crime Time
Deathbringer
Face Off
Fatal Rewind
Football Director II
Hard Nova
The Immortal
The James Bond Collection
Last Ninja III
Leisure Suit Larry 5
The Magic Garden
Martian Memorandum
Mega Twins
Might and Magic III
OutRun Europa
Pitfighter
Rise of the Dragon
7 Colors
Super Space Invaders
Volfied
Vroom

Still Available:

Afterburner 2
Alien Breed
Alien Storm
Armalyte
Armourgeddon
Atomino
Beast Busters
Bonanza Bros
Burger Time Deluxe
Castelian
Castle of Illusion
Castles
Centurion - Defender of Rome
Chase HQ
Choplifter 2
Chuck Yeager's Air Combat
Cloud Kingdoms
Cruise for a Corpse
Deuteros
Dragon Crystal
EA Hockey
Elf
The Executioner
F-117A: Stealth Fighter 2
F-14 Tomcat
F-15 Strike Eagle II
F-Zero
Final Fight
Flicky
Floor 13
Footballer of the Year 2
Formula One Grand Prix
Frenetic
Ghost Battle
Gunshop 2000
Halley Wars
Hatris
Heart of China
Hero Quest
Hudson Hawk
Hunter
In Your Face
James Buster Douglas Boxing
Jetfighter II
Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker
Kageki
Logical
Lotus Turbo Challenge 2
Magic Pockets
Manchester United Europe
Martian Dreams
Marvel Land
The Magnetic Scrolls Collection
Maupiti Island
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Silent Service II
The Simpsons
Sneaky Snakes
Sonic the Hedgehog
Space 1889
Super Professional Baseball
Super R-Type
Switchblade II
Tail Gator
Thunderhawk
Thunderjaws
Utopia
Wardner Special
Wing Commander II
Zone Warrior

new releases

BABY JO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Loriciels**

Imagine, if you will, Mirrorsoft's *Brat* in two dimensions and you've got a pretty good idea of what the latest import from French firm Loriciels is all about. Or if you don't know *Brat*, try imagining *Mario* with a nappy-wearing babby as the main character.

It's all really rather ludicrous, with the teeny toddler having to eat the bonus goodies as he bounces along the landscape in order to keep fit - but he mustn't eat too much, or he'll mess his nappy! I mean come on! Just what are these French weirdo games designers on? Something pretty strong and more than a little lethal if the quality of Baby Jo's aesthetics are anything to go by. Poorly designed sprites, atrocious music and hideously jerky scrolling backdrops are all proof of Baby Jo's naffness, but it has to be said that it is kind of cute in a rather perverse sort of way. Perhaps it's something to do with the weather?

But if there's one thing it certainly isn't, it's fun - the slow, annoying gameplay and hastily thrown-together design makes sure of that. It's for precisely those reasons that Baby Jo should only really be on the shopping list of platform freaks desperate (and we're talking 'cocaine junky' desperate here) for a new fix - and even then there are much more playable options available.

☆☆

CAPTAIN PLANET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Action**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Pass the lentils, man. Thanks. Yeah, like I was telling you there's like this guy, right, and he's like this sort of super-hero, you know. Goes around saving the world from these real heavy breadhead polluters. Yeah, like you say. Heavy shit, man. Anyway, he's got these five helpers, and they're like just kids, you know, but they've got this special rings that give them these cosmic powers. Totally amazing. Each level of the game like centres around one of these six characters, and they're just far out.

I mean like the first character, Ma-Ti, uses her ring to like chill out the bad guys and regrow plants so she can climb up to the level exit. Yeah, and like when she gets out there's this helicopter she has to fly around in and scoop up endangered elephants and take them to a sanctuary. Yeah, exactly. It's like this amazing mix of platform game and shoot-'em-up. Mmmm, yeah, the graphics are sort of cute, the scrolling's fine, and the tunes are neato, but control over your little sprite guy's a bit tricky. Yeah, Tricky Dicky. Watergate. All The President's Men. But you get used to it and all in all it's quite a far-out experience, if not the slickest most-professional thing like you've ever seen. Lots of far-out psychedelic colours, too.

☆☆☆☆

CELTIC LEGENDS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

It's amazing how you can tell, 99% of the time, what an RPG game is going to be vaguely like just by knowing what part of the world it's from. For example, if it's from California it's likely to be all complex and involved, while anything from, say France or Germany, while still having all the traditional FRP elements, always tends to present things in a much more simplistic and arcadey manner. As is the case here, with this little Gallic number which is very much in the same vein as Thalion's *Dragonflight* and countless other Euro RPGs. It's actually a fine little game, based around all the old RPG clichés, but handling them with traditional French style and aplomb. It's all set in the mythical world of Celtica, where the misuse of magic by an evil sorcerer has wrenched the kingdom in twain. What follows is a mix of strategy and conventional RPG elements presented from a number of viewpoints - on the battlefield, high above the world itself and so on, depending upon the scene. Though it offers nothing that seasoned genre fans will find particularly earth-shattering, it's different enough in terms of presentation and style to make it well worth investigating - especially for novice gamers who may be looking for an accessible and appealing introduction to the genre.

☆☆☆☆

CRIME TIME

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Starbyte**

Crime Time is an attempt to break into 'adventure-without-typing' market cornered by Lucasfilm and Sierra on the IBM PC. Unfortunately, it's not a fraction as good as their wares.

The game opens with a moderately-interesting intro which takes along time to tell you that somewhere in the City a crime has been committed (tell us something we don't already know). Well, I say moderately interesting, and it is... first time around. Unfortunately it can't be skipped and has to be watched everytime the game is loaded. Annoying.

And this over-indulgence on the part of the programmers and lack of thought for the player extends to the game itself. It's a graphic adventure - there's a picture window at the top of the screen and a list of actions and nearby items at the bottom. The idea is the player selects an action with the mouse (i.e. 'Take') and then an item from the list (i.e. 'Key'). While hardly ground-breaking in its innovation, it at least has the virtue of being a system that works reasonably well. Movement around the game world is by clicking on the points of a compass that also sits at the bottom of the screen. As the player moves from the location to location a new graphic slowly fades in pixel by pixel... painfully slowly. Bad. The scenery graphics are fine, but drawn at a series of badly-skewed angles for no other reason than to be different, with the end result that they are just painful to look at. On top of that the adventure isn't all that interesting either. Strictly one for die-hard adventure fans only.

☆☆

DEATHBRINGER

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Empire**

So there's this sword, right. And these evil wizards - and we're talking baby-eating variety here - have magically given it the ability to absorb the souls of any unfortunate it slays. Their inten-

tion is to use it to get rid off their goody-goody though thicky-thicky nemesis Karn, a barbarian so stupid he can't even spell his own name right. However, luck isn't on the wizards' side, and the sword somehow finds its way into Karn's calloused hands. Hardly believing his luck, Karn sets out to give the sword back to the wizards - in style. Basically it's all a thinly-veiled excuse for a sideways scrolling bloodfest of hacking and slaying, with Karn plowing through wave after wave of bizarro monsters.

Deathbringer boasts some of the most impressive parallax-scrolling backgrounds yet seen, even if they are somewhat lacking in colour. The sprites are well-drawn with a nice line in humour, but they're rather garish in a monochromatic sort of way. But despite its good graphics and adequate sound, Deathbringer's real problem is that in the all-important gameplay it's basically all a bit dull. The combat moves are limited - strike up, across and down - and slow to implement, while just wandering along, endlessly plugging away at the baddies, is not all that interesting either. And the prettiest backdrops in the World can't make up for that. *Barbarian III* this ain't.

☆☆☆

FACE OFF

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher **Krisalis**

There aren't that many Ice Hockey games available on the Amiga. In fact, there aren't any. So Face Off is something of a welcome addition to the canon of sports games. Worth getting? Well, yes and no. Like *Manchester United Europe*, it's a very polished game, with some super slick menu and option screens. There's a league to participate in, where the player can do anything from train the players to rename the manager. And like *MUE*, the player can turn off the arcade game and concentrate on the managerial side of things if they're that way inclined, or alternatively just play the arcade game alone.

The arcade side of things is okay, although some may wish the action had just a touch more zip. Certainly compared to *E.A. Hockey* it's distinctly sluggish. Control is simple and easy to pick up - shoot, pass or thump via the joystick - and the sport is fun, especially when things get a little physical and the fists start flying. As standard on most sports games these days there's a replay function so that that blistering goal can be replayed again and again. Overall, Face Off is a rounded package, though unlikely to exactly grab the public's imagination. Fans of the sport will enjoy it, but just how many of them are there in the UK?

☆☆☆☆

FATAL REWIND

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis/Electronic Arts**

Psygnosis disappoints nobody with its first foray onto the 16-bit consoles, maintaining the same high quality of graphics and sound that's made it the legend it is in the Amiga market. And thankfully in this case there's the gameplay to back up the visuals. But if *The Killing Game Show* had to be renamed for its transition from the Amiga to the MegaDrive, couldn't they have come up with something a little better than Fatal Rewind? Apart from the fact that it doesn't actually mean much, it's a fairly obvious attempt to sound like *Total Recall*, a film which bears no resemblance to this game at all.

The player is put in charge of a mechanical walker reminiscent of the ED-209s in *Robocop*. An agile little thing, it can run left and right, jump, fire and even climb up the sides of walls. Things they can do nowadays, huh? The player has to negotiate a network of platforms in the hunt for the exit to the next level. Aliens fly on from all sides, swirling and swarming about the screen with the sole intent of seeing the player bite the dust. And just to give the player a touch more incentive to escape the platforms are slowly sinking into a deadly red sea. The need to find keys to certain areas adds a small amount of depth to the game, but these arcade adventure elements never swamp what is basically a very classy and addictive shoot-'em-up.

☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **D&H Games**

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Yaaaaaawn. Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against football - there's just something implicitly boring about management games of this type. Player Manager is the exception to the rule, firstly because it's so excellent and secondly because you got to play Kick Off with it, which made it doubly excellent. When faced with something like this, though, it's difficult to imagine anybody but the most desperate sort of gamer or die-hard footy fan actually getting any enjoyment out of it.

Technically of course, there's nothing to fault it, and the depth that the game goes into is commendable - you've got your league and cup trophies, financial problems, player injuries, team tactics, talent scouts, stadium management and all the rest of it. On the aesthetic side, however, nothing much seems to have changed since the days when these games were prevalent on the Spectrum about three or four years ago.

These days, however, the cheapo graphics and sound just don't cut it any more, do when something like this comes along it seems like a bit of an embarrassment, really. But of course it's the gameplay that counts and for what it is, Football Director is entertaining enough, and providing you're not expecting too much and willing to give the game some time, it should pay off handsomely. The wiser members of the computerised football-management fraternity will probably want to save their pennies for *Player Manager 2*, however.

☆☆☆

HARD NOVA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Hard Nova's a game that's difficult to categorise. Like *Starflight 2* it's a mixture of styles, boasting strategy as well as role-playing elements, adventure as well arcade space-flight sequences. It's the sort of stuff that Electronic Arts in America have been churning out for years - science fiction odysseys with alien worlds, sleazy mutant characters, big spaceships clanging together and all the rest of it. There's supposedly a comic edge to this one, with the player taking on the persona of wisecracking space bitch Hard Nova. You can interact with characters, RPG-fashion, collect objects, do missions and trek across the galaxy, kidnapping, ferrying cargo from planet to planet and so on and so forth. It sounds like a bit of a cop out, but if this sort of malarkey is your cup of tea, then you're liable to have a lot of long-lasting fun with it - it's just a shame that the vast majority of gamers don't have the patience to get into it. Well worth checking out - the game's got plenty of atmosphere (ho ho!), and gets progressively more involving the longer it's played. Just don't expect to be able to pick it up and get playing straight away.

☆☆☆

THE IMMORTAL

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

It's over a year now since The Immortal appeared to great public acclaim on the Amiga. A masterpiece of animation and game design, like FTL's *Dungeon Master* it was probably responsible for selling a fair few 1Mb upgrades. At last it's made it's way on to the PC, and now features a couple of new enhancements that make it any even better game.

The majority of the game is identical. The player guides a superbly-animated wizard on his travels around an isometric-3D dungeon. As he progresses around the corridors, he discovers treasure, traps and - of course - terrifying monsters. In the original Amiga game, the fairly complex combat took place at the same scale as the rest of the game (i.e. small) and it made judging responses to the opponents lunges and feints a touch difficult. On the PC, however, when combat occurs the view switches to a close-up that makes things far easier.

The only gripe from a PC owners point of view is that having been spoiled by the recent plethora of 256-colour games, the 16 on display here are a little disappointing. However, this doesn't seriously detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and recommended without hesitation to anyone who fancies a bit of dungeon n' dragoning.

☆☆☆☆

THE JAMES BOND COLLECTION

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Domark**

Given that Domark has been punting out James Bond licences for so long (ever since the dire *A View To A Kill*, in fact), it hardly comes as a surprise to see a compilation appear as soon as there are enough titles to put one together. So here it is, comprising three 16-bit 007 games so far - *Licence To Kill*, *Live And Let Die* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

Of the three, *Spy* is probably the best, comprising an agreeable mix of gameplay styles - there's a bit of *Spy Hunter* in two little race games, some *Xenon 2* in a smart underwater shoot'em-up, a double helping of *Operation Wolf*-style duckshoots and a neat puzzle-based sub-game.

Licence To Kill, also a collection of sub-games, comes a close second, offering equally classy and playable action, but with slightly less variety (they're all birds-eye race'n'chase affairs).

Live And Let Die is the worst of a good bunch - originally an Elite game called *Aquablast*, it was hastily modified to look a bit more like the film and renamed appropriately. As befits a game where the licence is bolted on at the last minute, it's not particularly similar to the film, consisting of a simple boat chase based on the film's... er... boat chase. It's not a bad laugh though, and on the whole the compilation offers better value than most on the market right now.

☆☆☆

LAST NINJA 3

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, well, well. After everyone has been shining up their shoes at the prospect of giving System 3's much touted, much lorded and much delayed conclusion of the Ninja series a right old kicking, the bleeding thing turns out to be great!

Applying a more arcade-adventure angle to the tried and tested Ninja formula, the boys at the System have produced a game which has all the visual appeal of the first two games in the series and none of the problems. Well, that's not quite the case, but instead of the game relying so heavily on the fight routines which, to be honest, were never that good, the emphasis has been moved onto the puzzle-solving element which isn't half as hard to implement.

Spanning an epic quest across a bunch of different zones (earth, air, fire, water and void) the game continually throws up different puzzles which the player must solve in order to reach the next stage.

Aside from completing these puzzles, there's a fair amount of rucking to be done too, and the collectible weapons add enough novelty to ensure that even when the player is doing over his twelfth adversary of the level, he'll find something new to do.

Graphically, the game is really rather special, with the isometric landscapes at a stage which must surely be approaching the state of the art, and the animations of the characters themselves being undeniably fine. Just look at the speed blur on that.

☆☆☆☆

LEISURESUIT LARRY 5

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Sierra On-Line**

He's Larry Laffer! She's Passionate Patti! And they're in a whole lot of trouble! Leisure Suit Larry 5, the latest instalment in the impossibly successful adventure series chronicles the spying adventures of America's favourite lounge lizard.

In what promises to be the most sexy adventure in the series, the player must guide Larry and Patti through a world of porn and mobsters in the quest to keep good honest smut on the airwaves. Initially taking the role of the audition host of America's Sexiest Home Videos, Larry quickly becomes embroiled in a hairbrained underworld plot to get all porn off the normal market and drive it underground where enormous profits can be made.

It's all pretty standard point and click stuff, but this time the player alternates between the very different personas of Larry and Patti, allowing both to get into sexy scrapes and also avoiding and particularly severe cries of "Sexism!" from bendy liberal wets.

Again, the hand-painted 256-colour graphics and game design are an excellent splint for what occasionally lapses into a bout of pretty lame gags. However, this time Larry does have moments of absolute brilliance, and the continual promise of a further saucy

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MAGIC GARDEN

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Good God! Whatever next. Having been plagued for months by an apparently never-ending stream of ceramic gnomes, we were understandably keen to get our hands on the game which they promote. And what a peculiar concoction it is.

In his endeavours to become 'the most efficient gnome', the player must guide a gnome around the eponymous magic garden doing, well, this is where it becomes a little bit unclear actually. He can do pretty much whatever he fancies. He can water the flowers. He can mow the lawn. He can use some magic seeds and fly around on the back of a big dragonfly! But the gnome must be careful, for there are terrible traps which live in the garden like big flowers which can hurt him or tall grass which can slow him down.

And Gnomey had better be careful with the number of objects he's carrying, or he will become too tired and get hit by lightning and die. But the gnome won't get hit by lightning if he is exploring the underground caverns where the toilet is! Gnomey can flush the toilet for extra efficiency.

Presented in side-on elevation, the game looks, plays, smells tastes and is just odd. It's as odd as anything I've ever seen in my life. Peculiar Beatrix Potter style graphics and gameplay which quite honestly is tricky to imagine appealing to the masses make Magic Garden a true enigma.
☆☆

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM

Price **IBM PC £35.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Access/US Gold**

Once again a game pretends to be an 'interactive movie' and turns out to be little more than a simplistic adventure with flashy graphics and sound. But in Martian Memorandum's case the aesthetics are enough to make up for the game design's shortcomings - or at least they seem to be for the first few hours. The game uses digitised video footage, sampled speech and film quality music to set the scene (the story casts you as a futuristic private detective who must travel to Mars to track down the kidnapped daughter of a famous industrialist), and it works very well, creating a strong sense of atmosphere and involvement.

But as is so often the case with games of this type, the effect of these flashy gimmicks soon wears off and when you actually buckle down to play the game you realise that there isn't really that much to see or do. An ardent adventurer could easily complete it inside of a week, because the linear game design means that it's almost impossible to go down the wrong track - it's as if you're being guided by an invisible helping hand, and that's not very satisfying.

Both of Dynamix's similar-styled titles *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* offer similar and more satisfying experiences, so if you've got the PC muscle to run so demanding a product, you'd be well advised to check either of those out instead.
☆

MEGA TWINS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

There's big trouble in the land of cutey things. A dark shadow, etc, etc, has fallen across the land, and it's up to the two sweetest and most unthreatening warriors ever to grace computer software to save the day. At its core Mega Twins is a platform game - one or two players guide their cutesy heroes through level after level of ledges and chasms, seeing off the attacking monsters with a lunge from their tiny little swords. Magic orbs can be found along the way that act as super weapons, which are particularly useful against the super-tough end-of-level nasties.

As a conversion of the CapCom coin-op Mega Twins is hardly startling, but it's competent enough. Apart from the slightly turgid pace of the action, the main thing that prevents Mega Twins from making any real impression is the lack of excitement. There are no real thrills on offer - the platform element is minor, and having to endlessly tap fire to jab the beasties into oblivion is hardly opening up whole new vistas of tele-visual entertainment. The final nail in the coffin is the fact that the whole thing is incredibly easy - a competent player will probably get half-way through the game on his first set of credits. Mega Twins had A-grade potential, but whether it's the fault of the original coin-op or the conversion it's actually turned out to be Meagre rather than Mega.
☆☆☆

MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ISLES OF TERRA

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **New World Computing/US Gold**

"By my mighty sword of Zorak, I, Hagor Dragonbone, must smite the evil doom-legions of Krynn before the alignment of the six moon-worlds!" Yes, well, you get the general idea. Might And Magic III is yet another delve into the much-explored realms of FRP gaming, this time coming over as a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *The Bard's Tale*. Is it just me or has the whole FRP genre been done to death so badly that there's just nothing new anymore?

This third Might And Magic outing would seem to support that argument, as apart from some very flashy VGA visuals and soundboard sonics, there seems to be very little new or interesting on offer, except maybe for that ever-persistent fraternity of die-hard RPG fanatics. As you'd suspect, the scenario is about as hackneyed as one is ever going to get, with some claptrap about returning the Ultimate Power Orbs (mmm, yes!) to the King. What that involves is selecting a party of dwarves, orcs, heroes, warriors and all that, and then wandering about fighting with dragons, collecting treasure and picking up clues.

The game itself actually is very pretty, but for the most part the adventuring is pretty slow and insubstantial. Considering, however, how conditioned FRP gamers have become, I doubt that anybody who's likely to buy *Might & Magic III* will be disappointed by what they find.
☆☆☆

OUTRUN EUROPA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

At long last! A game that has become a legend, along with the likes of *Star Trek* and *Birds of Prey*, over the last couple of years, simply because it's taken so bloody long to come out. The original idea was to release the product to cash in on the wave of euphoria from the original *OutRun* conversion - which should give you an idea of how long we've been waiting for it. We ended up getting the offiical sequel, *Turbo OutRun* first, which wasn't much cop, and now we've got this, which isn't either.

The basic idea is that the player has to take charge of a variety of vehicles - car, bike and boat - as he races over various land-and-sea stages to deliver a vital package, while international agents are out to stop you. It's all a bit ludicrous really, and what's seemingly supposed to be a cross between *OutRun* and *Chase H.Q.* with extra knobs on is in fact a bit of a shoddy mess. The road sections aren't much fun to play because control of the vehicles is so bloody over-sensitive, and the enemy cars just keep on getting in the way in a way that isn't conducive to gameplay at all, but is just very frustrating. The boat bits don't even bear think about because they're so unjust and difficult, and 99% of players will probably put their foot through the monitor screen within five minutes of loading it up. Talking of loading, the constant disk accessing is a pain in the prostate, and it all hardly seems worth it when it's not even very clear what's actually going on in the game. There are far better race games available, so don't waste your precious time pondering over this one.
☆

PITFIGHTER

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Domark**

If ever there's a prime example example of an excellent conversion of an average coin-op then Pitfighter is it. If you're an arcade goer then you're prob-

ably more than familiar with the game. With its giant monitor screen, three sets of player controls and stand-out digitised graphics you could hardly miss it. Trouble was, underneath the unique flashy visuals and meaty sound lurked a distinctly dull beat-'em-up, made even worse by the confusion caused by the grainy-looking graphics. Where's my bloke gone? Is he hitting me or not? You know the sort of thing. All in all, a less than rewarding experience.

In converting Pitfighter for the home systems, Teque London have actually improved it a Hell of a lot. Indeed, if you liked the coin-op, chances are you'll like the home game even more. The graphics, which have retained pretty much all of the flash special FX of the coin-op, are clearer, and the slower pace makes the game much easier to play. The joystick controls are a little uninstinctive, but it only takes a few goes to get the swing of things. But as good a conversion as it is, it still can't compensate for the fact that fundamentally Pitfighter's about as exciting as tapping a fire button all day. Which in Pitfighter, I'm sad to have to say, is pretty much what you spend all your time doing.

☆☆☆

RISE OF THE DRAGON

Price **Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Amiga owners have been scrambling to become the first to purchase this- the first or a new wave of Sierra games helmed by the perennially popular Dynamix team. But they should be warned. While Amiga owners get to enjoy just as many visual thrills and plot twists as their PC Pals, they pay the price of swapping ten (count every last one as it slips in and out of your drive for the umpteenth time) disks.

However, if you're willing to pay the access-time price, Rise is an extremely rewarding product. The player takes the role of a futuristic detective, a real Marlowe type, slugging his way through a drug addled city of sleaze, the last remaining obstacle between the mysterious Dragon and total control of the entire planet! Played in first-person perspective, the game uses the no-typing-necessary control interface which Sierra have made their trademark.

This is another example of the interactive movie deal which American companies are so fond of forcing down our throats, but for once it isn't too bad. There is actually a story here! And there is actually some adventuring to do. The player must investigate the strange drug-related death of the Mayor's daughter, interrogate scummy criminals and do all the other stuff that private investigators have to do. Wire taps, opening other people's mail, hanging out in low-rent strip joints. What a life.

And it's all in those lovely hand drawn graphics. Mind you... all those disks...

☆☆☆☆

SEVEN COLORS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Infogrames**

Tetris, the game that started it all, may be getting on a bit now, but there's always room for a new puzzle game on the market. The only problem is that the vast majority of puzzlers that have been washing up on these shores from America and Europe have either been of unbearably low quality, or just too weird to get the head round.

Seven Colors from Infogrames, a company that prides itself on its off-the-wallness, fits snugly into the latter category. It's played over a large board made up of hundreds of tiny coloured diamonds where the objective is to change as many diamonds to your colour, spreading them like a virus across the screen, faster than your opponent does. The first player to fill half the screen area is the winner. It's difficult enough to understand when you're actually playing the game, so don't worry if you're a little foggy after that brief explanation.

In fact the major problem with the game is that it's not very easy to understand, and because things just seem to happen it's not very easy to keep track, or indeed to work out what's going on at all. The confusing situation is further compounded because the instructions hardly explain anything at all. Persistent players may well get something out of it however, and there's a variety of game options to spice up the action if they do. Oh, and there's some very nice in-game classical music which suits the game perfectly. It's very soothing indeed, and make Seven Colours worth booting up even when the game's gone stale.

☆☆

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SPEEDBALL 2

Price **IBM PC £9.99**
Genre **Sports game.**
Publisher **Imageworks**

Now this is the game that PC owners have been waiting for. After all, there's not exactly a plethora of future sports games on the PC, let alone half-decent ones.

Speedball 2 appeared on the ST and Amiga about a year ago to great acclaim from just about anyone who could hold a joystick. Indeed the Amiga incarnation won itself an ACE Trailblazer. And the good news is that the PC version is just as good.

Speedball 2 can best be summed up as rugby without any form of rules or moral scruples. The player (or players) controls a team of rugged ruthless hardmen, each of whom has one aim in life - to ram a steel ball into the opposing team's goal mouth. Actually, that's wrong, they have two aims, the other one's to ram their fists into the opposing team's mouths. The player only controls the member of the team nearest the ball, and can perform a variety of actions such as thump and throw. The other players are controlled by the computer act and act intelligently, so the passing and tactical possibilities are huge. From time to time bonuses or power-ups appear on the pitch, just to spice the action up a little (as if it needed it).

Matches can be played as one-offs or as part of a knockout or league chamepionship. The latter two options are excellent, with the player able to train his team up using the credits earned during the game. There's a real sense of progress as your team, Brutal Deluxe, works its way up the charts.

With its big, bold, fast graphics (the multiway scrolling pitch is litle short of incredible on the PC) and meaty sound the game's got immediate pulling power, and the exciting addicitve action provides the reason to keep coming back. It's a true PC classic. And at this price, you'd be a sad fool to leave it on the shop shelf.

☆☆☆☆☆

SUPER SPACE INVADERS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Domark**

Actually, it's not that 'Super' at all. In fact, it looks like Little Johnny's first fumbling attempts with his new AMOS package if the truth be told. Basically, Domark have taken the aging classic, tarted it up beyond recognition with some flashy graphics, thrown in some power-ups to keep the kids who remember *Space Harrier* more clearly than *Space Invaders* happy, retained the old sound effects to get Grandad moist-eyed with nostalgia, and then totally fouled up the original's marvelously uncluttered gameplay.

So now we have aliens who swirl about circles, others who attack in *Galaxian*-like swoops, others that grow every time they get shot - the list goes on and on and (yawn) on. The only highlight is the cow-mutilation bonus section, where UFOs swoop down and try to kidnap the cattle milling about the bottom of the screen. Kidnapped cows can be rescued by shooting the escaping saucer, whereupon the cow falls back to Earth with a jolly cry of 'Thank you'. How cute.

With its slow, jerky graphics and depressingly dull gameplay, it's hard to believe that anyone had the gall to release Super Space Invaders onto today's demanding market. But they did. Shame.

☆

VOLFIED

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Empire**

Qix is back in town, and better than ever! No matter how widely tastes may differ among the gamesplaying fraternity, you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who doesn't enjoy a game of good old *Qix*. Its appeal is universal because it's so simple and addictive, and like Breakout, its gameplay has stood the test of time. What Volfied (converted from Taito's coin-op) represents is a 90s version of the original classic - it is to *Qix* what *Arkanoid* was to *Breakout*, keeping the original framework intact, but adding lots of pretty backdrops, power-ups and extra features.

For the most part it's much the same - draw boxes around the screen to fill up 75% or more of the screen area without the fusewire which makes up the line itself getting hit by any of the marauding enemies - which, instead of the old gyrating line, now takes the form of a giant mothership that roams about spitting about bullets, and a couple of pesky little helpers. Lasers and speedups are among the collectables, while high-tech backgrounds and SFX provide the aesthetic overhaul.

Since *Qix*-style games are so thin on the ground, Volfied, with its classy execution and uncluttered gameplay is a welcome addition to the software scene - and if you've got any sense and admiration for the classics, you'll add it your collection too.

☆☆☆☆

VROOM

Price **Atari ST £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Lankhor**

Without wanting to be nasty to our European counterparts, what with 1992 and all that, it has to be said that most of the software that crosses over from the continent is a bit smelly. Vroom, however, from French publisher Lankhor, has proven itself to be the exception to the rule. Although it's not a patch on the likes of *Indianapolis 500* or *Formula One Grand Prix*, Vroom is nevertheless a jelly supper racing game, boasting very impressive speed as the player vrooms his way (hence the name) around a first-person vector-driven environment.

It's got all the usual fixtures and fittings - rear-view mirrors, pit-stops, overhead maps,bridges, dips and hills on the track, training modes, qualifying laps, choice of courses and some spectacular crash sequences. It's more of a racing game than simulation, as controls and instrumentation has been kept to a minimum - there's nothing too much to worry about here apart from going very fast, avoiding the other cars and keeping on the road. And it works well enough, being very playable and actually quite compulsive, with the array of racing options adding to the game's longevity. The only dodgy factor is that the joystick option is restricted to the arcade mode - the more serious race options only allow mouse control. Very dodgy indeed, especialy if your ST mouse is as poor as ours is.. But apart from that, not at all bad.

☆☆☆

COMPETITION WINNERS!!

You lucky people! Well, two of you are anyway. What am I talking about? Why, the winners of last month's *Heimdall* and Pink Pages compos, that's what.

Hearty congratulations are in order for Mr J. Cook of Tyersal, Bradford, who correctly remembered that Core Design's other axe-wielding hero was *Torvak the Warrior*. Well done, Mr Cook! You'll be pleased to know that even as you read this your likeness is being coded into *Heimdall* as one of the crewmen. And don't forget that a specially forged *Heimdall* axe will soon be winging its way to you. So get ready to duck the next time the postman knocks on your door.

And equally hearty congratulations to James Rowell of Market Deeping for managing to count that there were twenty five-star games in last month's Pinks. If you could let us know which machine you own, James, that £100 worth of software will be in the post before you can say "Aren't I a lucky little blder."**

Thanks to the many people who entered both those competitions. Hey - we're just sorry you all couldn't have won a little something. (Cue vomiting and lamentations.)

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Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

The epitome of the arcade blast, Afterburner is a classy piece of fluff. And this conversion isn't half bad. Flying an F-14 into the screen, the player must fly through 23 stages, blasting away enemy fighters with his unlimited number of machine gun rounds and limited missiles. Enemy fighters can also be downed by using homing missiles too.

The game is fast - very fast. In fact, in some sections it's as quick as the arcade machine. Performing a 360 degree roll by baking hard and then banking the other way is an exhilarating experience. And on the whole, in fact, the whole game is pretty exciting fare, even when it's fully understood quite how mindless it all is.

This is the sort of game that the Megadrive was built for. At the other end of the Sonic scale, even though it's another arcade blast, Afterburner does a surprisingly good job of showing exactly what the Megadrive is capable of, so long as you don't look to deep.

Even though the speed is up to scratch, the gameplay certainly doesn't come up smelling of roses. It's the definitive Afterburner 2 conversion and, just like the coin-op, is heavily flawed.

☆☆☆

ALIEN BREED

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Team 17**

Alien Breed can best be described as the Aliens licence that should have been. It grafts Aliens atmosphere onto Gauntlet-esque gameplay to create an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner. One or two players can take part simultaneously, and their job is to run around the six plan-viewed maze-like levels of a monster-infested space station, blasting seven shades of slime out of anything that crawls, slithers or lurks.

Fortunately the problem that always afflicted Gauntlet (i.e. though fun, there was no real aim to playing apart from scoring points) has been averted by giving the players a task to complete on each level (normally of the 'find a location and blow it up' nature). Okay, so it's not exactly lifting the game into Arcade Adventure territory, but it's provides enough of a goal to keep the player coming back for more.

The addictive gameplay is backed up by some super-slick scrolling and graphics (although the animation is a little perfunctory), and the term 'arcade-like' is very appropriate here. Throughout the use of sound to create atmosphere and tension is superb, especially when the station's self-destruct sequence is kicked in and the player has to find the exit before the place blows. The only real gripe is that given that the game is for 1Mb Amigas only, you can't help feeling that something slightly more ambitious could have been attempted. But as it stands this is the best straightforward blast for months, and that's a good enough recommendation for anyone.

☆☆☆

ALIEN STORM

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

Alien Storm is a real stonker in the plot department. Once again, aliens are over-running the Earth and it's up to the player (and a possible friend) to kick their scaley butts back to the slime-ridden hold from whence they came. Like the very similar Golden Axe, three suitably awesome figures - Earth's last line of defence - stand ready to save the world from alien domination. There's the heroically-names Gordon, saucy Karla and the robotic Scooter, who bears an uncanny resemblance to C-3Po (although he never wielded an electronic bullwhip).

Together they have to blast their way through eight levels of alien filth. The hero(es) stroll from left to right basically slaying everything that moves before it gets too close. After a while the view changes to that of an Op Wolf style game. By guiding crosshairs around the screen the player has to destroy everything.

This being a shoot-em-up, one would have thought more emphasis would have been placed on the weapons but alas they fail to deliver much excitement, being rather dull. Only moderately recommended for two players.

**

ARMALYTE

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Thalamus**

It's just as well that space is infinite - it'd need to be to contain the seemingly endless stellar battles that, according to the softcos, constantly rage throughout the Universe. Thalamus' latest hymn to galactic violence is a 16-bit updating of its C64 hit from many Earth years ago.

The player is given the difficult - if completely unoriginal - task of fighting his way through five levels worth of horizontally scrolling scenery populated by all manner of really rather annoyed aliens. The scenery scrolls a little up and down, which introduces a small but welcome element of exploration as the player weaves around trying to find the safest path to the end of level monster.

Armalyte is an unworthy tribute to its illustrious 8-bit ancestor. Technically it's excellent, with some slick parallax scrolling (especially good on the ST version given the machine's hardware) and polished presentation. However, the difficulty level has been set ridiculously high and even the most skilled gamer will soon be reduced to an apoplectic state of hair-tearing frustration. This situation is not helped by the excessive inertia on the player's ship which soon had the fragile craft skidding uncontrollable about the screen (and usually straight into the deadly-to-touch scenery). On the basis of the evidence here, let's hope Armalyte's sub-title of The Final Run is correct.

***

ARMOURGEDDON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Psygnosis' latest 3D-polygon effort centres around a six-part mission to find

the five pieces of a neutron bomb and use it to destroy an enemy HQ. There are six combat vehicles to try out, ranging from ground-hugging tanks and hovercraft to high-flying jets and helicopter and the player must use his 'skill and judgement' to decide when, where and how best to use them to achieve his current mission objectives.

Mouse control of each vehicle is smooth and responsive, with the fluid 3D giving a good pulse-quickening feeling of speed.

The player can switch between the vehicles 'in the field' using the function keys (the computer puts the vehicle on auto when this happens, so there's no risk of a recently-vacated jet ploughing nose-first into the ground). Like Core's Thunderhawk, the accent is on action rather than simulation, with the enemy attacking almost as soon as the player pokes a metal-shielded nose out of his bunker, which makes for exciting is somewhat relentless action. But it's not all shoot, shoot, shoot. There's an important management element as well, where the player has to wisely allocate scientists and technicians to develop new weapons and fresh vehicles to replace those blown to pieces by the very active enemy.

Armourgeddon is one of Psygnosis' best games to date, with solid gameplay backing up the impressive visuals. Armourgeddon sick of it? Not one bit.

☆☆☆☆

ATOMINO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Hmmm, fashinating! There are few games based around atomic physics, and even fewer interesting ones, so a big "Huzzah!" and pat on the back for Psygnosis. Atomino is a puzzle game based around atomic valency, i.e. the number of bonds an atom can make with other atoms. Hydrogen, for example, can make one bone while Helium can make two. The aim of the game is to place randomly-allocated atoms down on a grid and try to form molecules of various sizes. (i.e. at least three atoms big). A molecule is only complete when all the atoms within it have their bonds accounted for. It all sounds a bit...well...dry, but in fact turns out to be great fun with its addictive challenge, pretty graphics and rising tempo sound making it one of the better puzzle games on the market.

☆☆☆☆

BEAST BUSTERS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Activision**

This is a competent conversion of the coin-op which proved to popular amongst the Uzi-loving arcade goers. It's basically yet another Op Wolf clone but features a welcome twist that instead of wasting terrorists the player (or players) are besieged by a veritable army of the Undead who attempt to stop anyone leaving the devastated city alive. Borrowing heavily from the Romero horror films, zombie dogs and shoppers and all manner of evil creatures can be literally blown into bloody bits of flying flesh.

The graphics manage to capture both the look and the feel of the arcade and virtually all the levels are present, but there's no denying that the inevitable substitution of a mouse for the cabinet-mounted Uzi is distinctly unsatisfactory. If you haven't already got a game of this type, and don't mind a mindless blast then it might be worth looking into, but otherwise there's not really enough new on offer to warrant purchase. It's a shame, because even the arcade version left the player cold after a couple of turns - it's not supposed to really drag the player in any more than that. But for the price, it would have been nice.

☆☆☆

BONANZA BROS

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

Bonanza Bros proved to be a something of a sizable his with Joe Public due to its peculiar graphic style and innovative angle of the team-up theme. The player(s) objective are blatantly

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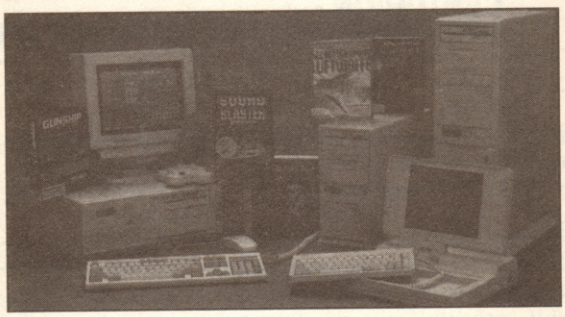

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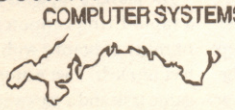

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DELIVERY NATIONWIDE

dishonest: burgle increasingly complex and heavily guarded buildings in Anytown, USA. Having already made a bit of a reputation for themselves, there;s a substantial reward on the Bros' heads ensuring that every available law enforcement officer is revoltingly keen to be the one to get them bang to rights.

The game uses a unique split screen to allow players to split up if necessary. Between the two play windows there's a schematic of the building, allowing the players to plan their routes efficiently so as to grab the goodies and avoid the nasties. Overall the game is a fairly enjoyable romp, with some hilarious cartoonish animation in places adding greatly to the fun, but like many Megadrive games it's longevity is in question.

☆☆☆☆

BURGER TIME DELUXE

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Data East**

Now this is a real blast from the past, when arcade games didn't have to throw punters around like some sub-standard funfair ride just to get them to part with their cash. The player here has to guide tiny Pete the Chef around a network of platforms and ladders. In a bizarre culinary exercise Pete has to make giant hamburgers by walking over the various ingredients lying on the platforms, forcing them to fall down the screen onto the the platform below and eventually onto a plate at the bottom. Once all the hamburgers have been made Pete advances onto the next, more complex arrangement of platforms.

Now this all sounds a bit easy, but you've reckoned without the mutant sausages, gherkins and fried eggs that have escaped from the cupboard and are wandering the platforms intent on Pete's demise. Fortunately the canny chef is armed with a pepper pot and a carefully-aimed shake will stun the baddies for a few moments allowing Pete to make good his escape. More finally, Pete can try to time his food-dropping antics to crush the ingenious ingredients. Burger Time Deluxe is a fun little game, although the graphics verge on the minuscule. It's probably a bit too simplistic for today's younger gamers, but nostalgia buffs will enjoy this tasty slice of the past.

☆☆☆

CASTELIAN

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Triffix Entertainment**

Remember Nebulus? It was a classy platform game starring a tiny blob called Pogo. Each of its tortuously-difficult levels was set on on a tall tower. The player could move Pogo left and right, and make him jump over game or shoot at the weirdo aliens. However, in a unique twist, the towers used to rotate to follow Pogo's movement. Quite a graphical achievement on the Speccy! Now Nebulus has come to the GameBoy under the title Castelian. And while the name may have changed the game certainly hasn't. It still looks stunning and plays well but has a difficulty rating through the roof. However, completing a tower is extremely satisfying, so if you fancy a real challenge then you know where to come.

☆☆☆☆

CASTLE OF ILLUSION

Price **GameGear £29.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

The Evil Mizrabel, jealous of Minny Mouse's beauty (who are they kidding?) has mousenapped her. Her beloved Mickey must enter the dreaded and mysterious Castle of Illusion to rescue her. Mizrabel's domain consists of five levels and mickey's task is to find the seven Rainbow Gems on each, all of which boil down to a lot of jumping from platform to platform, picking up and throwing blocks, sliding down slopes and climbing ladders.

Fundamentally it's a Mario clone and not a bad one at that. There are some original touches, such as the Toyland level which scrolls from left to right, which proves pretty disorientating but challenging nonetheless. The graphics are very attractive and the sound is superb. In fact, it's games like this that make GameGear owners feel that they've done the right thing in laying out the cash for a colour handheld.

☆☆☆☆☆

CASTLES

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Interplay/EA**

Castles takes several gameplay genres and combines them with a healthy dollop of historical authenticity. The game consists of three increasingly difficult scenarios revolving around the not particularly enthralling sounding task of constructing castles. Each castle consists of wall sections, gateways and towers. There are seven classes of labourer available and the player's main game task is to apply the optimum mix of labourers to each section in an attempt to finish the castle as quickly as possible.

Every so often the player is attacked by the neighbouring Welsh (seems some things never change). Initially the opposition are incredibly weak and their rise in strength is gradual, so defeating them is a lot easier than it ought to be. Although addictive enough to ensure repeated play, Castles is minorly flawed in too many ways to achieve classic status.

☆☆☆☆

CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Cast as an aspiring Centurion, it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact that the player starts with just a single legion of soldiers and a city of disgruntled citizens to keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy, the player can take part in chariot races and keep taxes light. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores become bigger and better. If the player's luck is really in he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if you're looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than to give this a go.

☆☆☆☆

CHASE H.Q.

Price **GameGear £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Race Game**
Publisher **Taito**

There can be few readers who aren't familiar with the excellent coin-op or its sequel S.C.I. What a brainwave on the part of the designers to combine high-octane racing action with bumper ramming action. The player takes on the role of an Armani-wearing Miami Vice style cop, chasing various perps in a souped up Porsche with the aim of ramming them off the road to make the arrest. The GameGear version is technically excellent, with lots of fast action and good sound, although the cars are a little small. Unfortunately, it's about as tough as a peeled banana, and even Granny will soon be locking away Mr Big. You're Busted? Well, actually you're likely to be bust after buying this - it's a lot of money for such a short-lived challenge.

☆☆☆

CHOPLIFTER 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Nintendo**

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing at times as you're a sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited number of bombs with which to protect himself. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆☆

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CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Chuck's previous two sims were purely for veggie pacifists, only permitting the player to do such nancy things as perform perfect loops and dives. This time around things have changed considerably, with luvverly GUNS making a welcome appearance. Air Combat allows the player to pilot war planes from any one of three eras: WW2, Korea and Vietnam. There is a multitude of single missions to fly along with a comprehensive campaign mode boasting over 15 missions. These include the standard 'seek and destroy' forays, protecting bomber formations and attacking ground targets. Should none of these take your fancy, the in-built mission designer is invaluable.

The most useful feature is the ability to replay missions after completion and view them from any angle, allowing the player to save all his most spectacular dogfights and crashes to disc. Even more interesting is the ability to duel planes from different eras, allowing such bizarreness as pitting a Mustang against an F-16. Class.

☆☆☆☆☆

CLOUD KINGDOMS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £7.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **GBH/Gremlin**

Cloud Kingdoms is a loud of balls - bouncing balls to be precise (Ha! The old ones are the best!). As Terry the Ball, the player has to negotiate thirty-two huge multiway-scrolling levels, each of which floats high in the sky, collecting all the gems that litter the narrow walkways. Terry has to take care not to leave the paths, else he'll fall to his doom and void below. This isn't as easy as it sounds - Terry's robbery body bounces wildly off walls and pillars, and parts of the floor may crumble beneath him. In addition, if Terry passes over arrows set in the floor they'll push him around, usually over the edge of the nearest chasm. If that weren't enough, other hostile spheroids wander the walkways, keen to see Terry's demise. Fortunately, Terry can bounce over their heads with a tap of the fire button.

Cloud Kingdoms, formerly from Millennium, is an attractive game, with a strong console feel. The cutesy graphics, though looking a little dated now do the trick, and the scrolling on both the Amiga and ST versions is very smooth. The inertia control is a little tricky to get to grips with, but rewarding when mastered. Some features annoy, like the fact that its impossible to know where crumbling floor is until it's been bounced on, but overall this is an unmissable bargain at just under eight quid.

☆☆☆☆

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say 'Inspector Wexford' the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it's be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large, fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e. 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immediately from place to place. As a user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns, walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of five (count 'em) game disks. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

DEUTEROS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

This sequel to Millennium 2.2 by the same authors is set a thousand years after the prequel's events. Mankind has fallen into a sort of post-technological malaise and forgotten its former space-travelling glory. It's the player's task to rekindle man's passion for the stars and turn the race into the masters of the Galaxy once again. The gameplay boils down to endless resource and manpower allocation between various departments, dealing with the occasional crises that crop up and so on. Although programmed well and moderately enthralling, there really isn't anything on show that hasn't been done more entertainingly elsewhere. Strictly one for the strategy diehard.

☆☆☆

DRAGON CRYSTAL

Price **GameGear £29.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Sega**

No fussing about with complex plot here. The player is riding his bike one day when he takes a wrong turning down a strange alleyway and ends up in a fantasy world bursting at the seams with dungeons n' dragons. As an RPG the gameplay couldn't really be simpler. The accent is firmly on action, with all the "Take the Rune Ring of Zrax to the Crack of Firetop Mountain" stuff firmly in the background.

Although competently done, it's a little difficult to see who exactly this game is aimed at. It's far too simple for the typical RPG head, while commuters are likely to get more than a little irate at having to shut down the power just before they complete a level just because they reached their tube stop. But if you've got the time, you'll find that this makes a welcome addition to the GameGear library.

☆☆☆

E.A. HOCKEY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Like Kick Off with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with John Madden's Football, EA pull yet another winner our of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on!

Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd bet-

ter be ready to put your fist where his mouth is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like!

A graphic and gameplay marvel, E.A. Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!

☆☆☆☆☆

ELF

Price **Amiga £25.95**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Ocean**

As Cornelius the Elf, it's the player's task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

Each massive maze-like level presents its own unique set of problems to solve and tasks to achieve, requiring that the player constantly evolve new strategies to deal with them. All in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp, perfect for platform or arcade adventure fans.

☆☆☆☆

THE EXECUTIONER

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Hawk**

The Executioner is Hawk's attempt to improve on the Asteroids style game. As in most inertia-driven titles, with the player flying through twelve galaxy sectors, blasting away rocks and then using fiscal benefits to purchase bigger and better weapons systems for your ship.

Dotted around the landscapes are pods which shot at the player and occasionally launch ships. Also to be found are fuel pods which must be collected if further play is to be enjoyed.

Initially, the Executioner is quite enjoyable, but soon tedium takes over. There just isn't enough gameplay variety to bring the player back for more. Also, the fact that a single alien missile can kill the player outright is far from encouraging. After the long struggle to work your way to the second stage, the player may well find himself whether he can really be bothered to continue.

The potential of the game simply hasn't been realised. The graphics are perfectly acceptable, but nothing to write home about, and the play of the game and in particular the behaviour of the player's craft itself is jerky and unpleasant. Boo.

☆☆☆

F-117A: STEALTH FIGHTER 2

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Your chance to pilot the Ugliest Plane in The World is a more inspiring one than you may think, although it's uncertain as to whether owners of the previous Stealth game will actually need this instalment in the series.

Opting to either pilot a realistic F-117A or an artificially enhanced 'Microprose' version, the player can enter his chosen war scenario, be it Cold, Limited or Conventional and then choose a particular location for the combat to take place. The number of combat arenas has been radically increased. Nine battlefields, including those from F-19, F-15 2 and some newies have been thrown in for good measure.

Graphically, F-117A is a marvel, with graduated skylines, complex objects etc. There are four detail levels for owners with slower machines. Be warned, even on a 20MHz 286, the frame rate is hardly silky-smooth.

There's no denying that F-117A is a superb flight sim, and Microprose's best yet. However, despite the radically overhauled graphics and increased number of combat arenas, one does wonder whether there's enough new in the gameplay to make it a vital purchase to owners of the original F-19.

☆☆☆☆

F-14 TOMCAT

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Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Activision**

There's no shortage of flight sims on the PC, but Activision's release may appeal to some. The game lets the player fly a series of missions around the Strait of Hormuz. The player can either pile straight into the action or start at the bottom and slowly work his way up through a full Navy career. After a good performance in a series of missions the player gets transferred to the Naval Fighter Weapons School better known as the home of the infamous Top Guns. Weaponry available is the usual mix of Sparrows, Sidewinders and Phoenix missiles, along with the cannon for close-up work. There isn't really much emphasis on realism in F-14 Tomcat and to be honest it really hasn't got much to offer players over other similar sims. In the final analysis, it's a satisfying enough effort without too much excess baggage.
☆☆☆☆

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Simulations**
Publisher **MicroProse**

MicroProse make a departure from their usual rigorously-accurate sims with this action-orientated affair. It's the flight sim equivalent of the Janet and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with no complications. Players have six combat arenas to choose between, each with various missions to select. These missions are nearly all simple 'get in, destroy a couple of targets and get out alive' jobs, with the player have to simultaneously defend against swarms of enemy jets. Control is via keyboard, joystick or mouse and is highly responsive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough but there are quicker 3D routines about - it's more than adequate for the job in hand, however. Sound is disappointing, with a white-noise hiss being being the player's only audio companion for most of the journey. In the gameplay department this is a winner, with plenty of white-knuckle action to get the adrenalin pumping. Veterans may bemoan the game's lack of depth, but anyone else should find this just their cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy Dodger in the saucer to boot.
☆☆☆☆

F-ZERO

Price **Super Famicom £34.99 (Import)**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Nintendo**

F-Zero takes advantage of the Famicom's built in background manipulation capabilities co create one of the fastest and smoothest illusions of 3D yet seen, if a little lacking in roadside detail. Simply put, F-Zero is a race game, with the track viewed above and behind the player's vehicle. At first, despite the impressive 3D, F-Zero appears to offer little over the myriad of other race games about, but after a few goes its qualities shine through.

The excellent control over the craft is more precise than in any other race game. As well as accelerate, brake, left and right controls, one can also use the Famicom controller's two side buttons as banking switches. This degree of precision means you can race your craft like a cross between a high-speed hovercraft and a rally car. F-Zero may not look like anything special, but it's genuinely one of those games that has to be experienced to be believed.
☆☆☆☆

FINAL FIGHT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In Metro City (loosely based on Noo Yoik) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.
☆☆☆☆

FLICKY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like Quasimodo, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scattered brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.
☆☆☆☆

FLOOR 13

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The myth that strategy games are boring has been well and truly exploded by a game that's likely to convert even confirmed trigger-addicts to a more staple and intelligent software diet. Floor 13 offers a new slant on the strategy genre by basing itself around a compelling scenario and offering gameplay that goes beyond the regular strategy framework.

Set in present-day Britain, it tells of a government-run secret police force that must avert scandals, wipe out subversive elements and generally protect the government from embarrassing incidents so that it doesn't fall from grace. As Director General of this corrupt agency, the player is solely responsible for its operations.

The game is played almost entirely from a single static screen of an office desk, onto which intelligence reports and newspaper stories arrive from the outside world and form the basis of the information which the player works from as plots and storylines unfold. Various sub-departments, such as surveillance, interrogation and disinformation are the instruments of the player's will, with shady agents tailing suspects, tapping phones, searching premises and even torturing and killing people to achieve the government's immoral aims.

The way in which the game reveals information as half-clues and red herrings mean that good detective work and thorough cross-checking of intelligence data is as important as the conventional strategic skills which are also required. It's all thoroughly absorbing, very realistic stuff, and comes highly recommended, even to those who can't normally stand strategy games.
☆☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR 2

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £7.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher **GBH/Gremlin**

This isn't really a sport game at all. It's more like a test of the player's knowledge of football trivia. Lots of text and dull graphics don't help things along, either. If triv's your bag then great, otherwise steer well clear.
☆☆

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Believe you me, you've never seen a racing game like this. Lotus 2? OutRun Europa? Indianapolis 500? Pah! They are but children's toys compared to the complete and utter excellence of Formula One Grand Prix, the latest and greatest game from the programming genius that is Geoff 'Stunt Car Racer' Crammond. The graphics are truly amazing, with highly-detailed cars

(complete with driver's helmet poking out of the cockpit) literally zooming around tracks lined with stands, trees, fences and cranes. The sound matches the visuals, with good use made of throaty samples for the engine.

But it's not just the quality of the graphics or the sounds that makes FIGP so special, it's the meticulous attention to detail that generates an authentic and involving Grand Prix atmosphere. Everything you'd expect to find on a Grand Prix circuit - stands, bridges, tunnels, etc - is there (and in the identical position they'd be found in real life), even extending right down to stewards pushing crippled cars off the track and engineer crews waiting in the pits. The wonderful control over the car is the essential icing on the cake, with plenty of difficulty modifiers to make the game easy enough for Granny Smith to play or tough enough to bring Sterling Moss out in beads of sweat. Indeed, so good is FIGP that it earned itself an ACE Trailblazer and the honour of becoming the new Racing Simulation Benchmark. Good enough for you?

☆☆☆☆

FRENETIC

Price **Amiga £20.99**
Genre **Shoot-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Core Design**

Hot on the heels of Warzone, Core release this vertically scrolling shoot-em-up which draws its inspiration from just about every other blaster ever released. To anyone more than halfway familiar with the genre the gameplay holds few surprises - the screen scrolls slowly down while wave after wave after wave of eminently blastable alien creatures swarm on screen. The now-standard power-ups can be collected by destroying various special aliens or weapons pods as they appear. At the end of each of the eight levels there's the obligatory huge meany that takes a huge amount of shots to destroy.

Frenetic is a competently executed game that lacks that spark of novelty to lift it out of the run-of-the-mill. The alien sprites are large, fast and mean, the action is non-stop and highly demanding at times. The most annoying niggle is the way that power-ups are lost when the player's ship is destroyed, leaving the player naked before the alien onslaught. Unless you've already got the superlative SWIV, this is a fair buy.

☆☆☆

GHOST BATTLE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Thalion**

Ghost Battle is a jumpin' n' thumpin' affair that borrows more than a few elements from Ghosts n' Goblins. The player is a hero who has to enter an evil demon's kingdom in an attempt to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend, On each level it's ladders, platforms, graveyards and underground caverns all the way, leading to a big baddy at the very end.

There are the usual extra weapons to collect and on later levels keys and various tools that must be used on machinery appear to add some much needed depth to the otherwise shallow gameplay. Ghost Battle is unimpressive graphically and sonically, and play is sluggish. Not one for the top of the 'must get' list.

☆☆

GUNSHIP 2000

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the company's earlier mega-hit Gunship, which has gone done in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just Gunship+. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvelously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel. The 'copter control is good,

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but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes Gunship 2000 not the sort of game to cut your sim-playing teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.

☆☆☆☆☆

HALLEY WARS

Price **GameGear £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Taito**

Given the fact that the vast majority of the software currently available for the GameGear doesn't even come close to doing the impressive handheld justice, Halley Wars comes as a breath of fresh air. Every handheld needs its top-flight shoot-'em-up. The GameBoy has Nemesis, the Lynx has Gates of Zendocon - and now the 'Gear's got a game that's arguably better than the pair of them. It wins no points in the originality stakes, being your typical space-based Xenon-style vertical blaster with all the standard pick-ups and end of level guardians, but it scores highly on execution, offering fine playability, colourful graphics, smooth animation and surprisingly impressive sound. The game's only major limitation is that, due to the machine's limitations, it can't produce the flashy effects that similar games on more powerful machines often rely on to hold the player's interest. So Halley Wars must depend on gameplay alone - and there's insufficient variety there to provide that all-important urge to progress to the later levels.

Also, it's a shame that the game is actually a bit easy and seasoned gamesplayers may find the long-term challenge somewhat lacking. That aside, it's still a fine blaster and undoubtedly one of the better GameGear titles so far - just don't expect to be playing it in a year's time.

☆☆☆

HATRIS

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Bullet-Proof Software**

Alexy Pajitnov is the fiendish mind behind the time-devouringly addictive Tetris. Now he's back with Hatris which, like its forebear, is deceptively simple in concept. Pairs of different hats fall down six 'lanes'. By moving the pair left or right and swapping the tumbling hats' position the player has to try and stack hats of the same type. Stack five hats together and they disappear. The longer the player survives the faster the hats fall. The game is over when the stack of hats reaches the top of the screen.

A 'Hatris' is scored when two stacks are completed at the same time. The players reward is a fireball which can be used to vaporise some of the hats at the top of the column. Alternatively the player can collect three fireballs and earn a helmet which can be used to crush all the in one lane.

Hatris takes a while to get into but eventually becomes as engrossing and addictive as its illustrious forbear. Recommended to all Tetris fanatics.

☆☆☆☆☆

HEART OF CHINA

Price **IBM PC £40.95**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Many games allude to the title of 'interactive movie' but very few actually deliver the goods. Fortunately Heart of China is one of the few games which is actually deserving of the lofty title. Set in the 1920s, the game puts the player in the shoes of troubleshooter 'Lucky' Jake Masters. Asked to find the wealthy society gal Kate Lomax, he soon ends up in the Far East.

Unlike most games it doesn't concentrate solely on one character, allowing the player the player to switch between the members of the cast and adding greatly to its film-like appearance. Also the numerous puzzles can be solved from a variety of different angles. Heart of China also has multiple endings which makes the game enjoyable to play even once it's been completed. To round it all off nicely there are also some polished arcade sequences, though fortunately these can be skipped if the idea doesn't appeal. If you like anything mildly adventurish then Heart of China comes highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

HEROQUEST

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Gremlin Games**

Hero Quest was one of the best selling boardgames of last year, and Gremlin look set to capitalise on that success with its excellent computer conversion. A game for one to four people, players can select to be one of four characters (or all if playing alone); Wizard (powerful magic, pathetic strength); Elf (little magic, normal strength) Dwarf (good strength, can spot traps); and finally Barbarian (amazing strength).

The game plays identically to its tabletop counterpart. Plays must complete fourteen quests in sets in a series of monster-infested dungeons, culminating in a showdown with ArchMage Morcar. All controls are via the mouse using icons and menus. Players move in turns with each location, corridor and room split into movement squares. During the adventures, players collect a variety of items ranging from gold to magic weapons to aid them on their adventures. Highly polished, the excellent isometric graphics, atmospheric soundtracks and superb attention to detail make this a worthy addition to the RPG genre.

☆☆☆☆

HUDSON HAWK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

Bruce Willis' film was a disaster, and Ocean hadn't turned out anything of note in the film conversion stakes for quite a while, so nobody was really expecting very much out of Hudson Hawk. But instead of the usual cynical and barely-playable licence, what we got was the best platform game so far this year. Special FX took a big gamble in its interpretation of the film by chucking 99% of the source material out of the window, and getting on with the business of just building a good game around the film's basic premise - that of a cat burglar stealing valuable artifacts from around the world.

It works superbly, in much the same style as former platform classics like Mario, Rick Dangerous and Switchblade, with small, comical characters playing over tortuously-designed platform levels. It's a class act, without a doubt, with fiendish traps and pitfalls lurking around every corner. The gameplay is easily up to console/arcade standard, and the graphics and sound really do enhance the fun factor because they're so jolly. Don't be put off by the shoddy licence connotations - Hudson Hawk is a brilliant game in its own right and deserves a place in your collection. Today.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUNTER

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's

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already awe-inspiring style. A winner.
☆☆☆☆☆

IN YOUR FACE

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Sports Game**
Publisher **Jaleco**

In Your Face is a basketball game which boasts some superb presentation. It has only one skill level, but four players of differing characteristics to choose from. The gameplay is simplistic; the player simply guides his on screen alter-ego around the court using the joypad, and stealing the ball is achieved by simply running into the opponent. This makes the game easy to get into but provides little lastability. There's a two-on-two option for some Kick Off style action (but nowhere near as good).

The game's major problem is the play area. It's much bugger than the screen which means the view is continually scrolling. On other machines this is not a serious thing, but the GameBoy screen blurs the image terribly. Nothing special, In Your Face is definitely one to leave On The Shelf.
☆☆

JAMES 'BUSTER' DOUGLAS BOXING

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Sport Arcade**
Publisher **Megadrive**

Oh dear. In the light of infinitely superior beat-'em-up games, James Buster Douglas is not so much on the ropes as on the stretcher.

Side-on-presentation Boxing games rely on speed, presentation and a wide enough number of moves to keep the player convinced that he can improve his technique. Unfortunately, Buster can offer us none of these elements, as the truly crappy fight scenes are more likely to cause a submission through sheer tedium than anything else.

Ridiculous and thoroughly unappealing graphics of the boxers shuffle towards each other and then furiously flail away with high and low blows until one of them falls over. You may feel the same way about boxing, but believe me, this is poor.

And for a fight game, it commits the cardinal sin of simply being too easy. Just by stabbing away at the fire button faster than your opponent, it's possible to win. There's no skill involved here. Crappy nonsense.
☆

JETFIGHTER 2

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Velocity/US Gold**

In a crowded market, Jetfighter 2 really stands out from the rest. The unlikely plot centres on the invasion of America's West COast by a confederation of Latin American countries. Full scale retaliation is our of the question, so small tactical strikes are the order of the day. There are four planes available with which to fly the missions: F-14; F-16; F-18 and the Top Secret F-23D 'Black Widow', a plane that combines the handling characteristics of the F-16 with the Stealth capabilities of the F-117A. Its advanced technology gives it a deadly advantage over the enemy.

Graphics are among the best yet seen on the PC, being both fast and impressively shaded. Sound is nothing too hot, but is adequate. The accent is more on action than simulation, making this one of the most exciting if not aerodynamically accurate sims available
☆☆☆☆☆

JIMMY WHITE'S 'WHIRLWIND' SNOOKER

*Price.***Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of IK+ and Dropzone is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics, none of them have really had any element of realism, until now.

The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in on so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no apparent reason or going off at peculiar angles.

Two player games are the best, but four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.
☆☆☆☆☆

KA•GE•KI

Price **Megadrive £39.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Sega**

The player is cast as a large-headed hero (who looks a bit like a thunderbird puppet on steroids) who must slowly battle his way through a multi-story tower block in an attempt to reach the top. Why, we don't know. The lift being out of order means you have to go through each level individually, a task not made any easier by the appearance of a number of other big-headed thugs.

For a beat-'em-up, Ka•Ge•Ki is distinctly underpowered. Apart from moving the player can punch, jab, jump, and that's about it. Ka•Ge•Ki leaves a lot to be desired. The graphics are just plain ugly, the backdrops are dull, although some of the sound it okay. The easy gameplay is substandard and the game has few redeeming features. There are far better titles available.
☆☆

LOGICAL

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £24.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Rainbow Arts**

Logical is a bit or a rarity, a thought provoking fast-action game which is genuinely as addictive as the blurb claims. The game is as follows; along the top of the screen runs a track. Along the track come coloured marbles which drop down channels into revolving disks. Each disk has four marble slots and is connected to other disks by further channels.

Your task is to rotate the disks (by clicking with the right M.B.) and launch marbles (click left) in such a way that each disk becomes filled with four marbles of the same colour. As always it sounds too simple, but there are various=ious complications and additions which spice up the gameplay, such as time limits, colour gates, teleporters and various other touches. The graphics are clear and well defined, and the sound is too good with some nice tunes and effects. With 99 levels, this should keep any puzzler addicted for a while.
****

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2
Amiga £24.99
Racing Game
Gremlin Graphics
A worthy successor to the excellent Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge, this game has a number of interesting differences to its predecessor. For a start, it's a better one-player game, but not so good for two players. Technically superior to the original, there's nevertheless something just a little bit lacking. Perhaps it's the removal of the laps system, or perhaps it's the fact that crashing into the other cars really doesn't do you that much damage. But whatever, it ain't quite as good.

However, it IS a great deal better than 80% of the driving games on the market, and there's a Link-up option allowing up to four players to race at once. The action is fast and furious and the control the players have over their cars has been greatly improved.

Players must blast their way through a selection of stages, each boasting a particular hazard, whether it be natural (snow, rain, sand) or man-made (enormous juggernauts rumbling across the road). Graphically superior to the vast majority of similar titles, Lotus just looks the business, with flashy trackside obstacles and a high level of detail on the cars themselves.

Despite being hampered by some aggravating deceleration whenever the player drives through any water and the flawed two player mode, Lotus 2 is a pretty impressive game.
****

MAGIC POCKETS

Price **Amiga £25.99**

Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Renegade**

The Bitmaps much hyped and opinion-splitting latest is a strange old affair. It looks great, has a simple enough premise and is regarded by many to be a piece of class action. To our minds, however, it just doesn't hang together.

The monsters in Bitmapland or somewhere have stolen the Bitmap Kid's toys. The Bitmap kid must journey through four worlds, retrieving his toys and overcoming a host of new and exciting challenges along the way.

Imagine Mario crossed with Speedball and that's what you get. Nearly. You get a peculiar Bitmap version of Mario cuteness which is actually quite irritating, a sub-standard control interface which is utterly charmless and leads to many stick-hurling incidents, and one of the most unnecessarily over-complicated score/power-up systems on the planet.

To help the kid in his side-on scrolling quest around the four worlds, power ups are available is the correct object collection procedures are followed. Having to sit down and work out how the system works when the very point is that these games are instinctive is a mere trifle compared to the fury instilled in the player who has to wait for the pick-up points to finish bouncing before he can collect them, ruining any fluidity or fun. Stop, start. Stop start. Stop.

☆☆☆

MANCHESTER UNITED EUROPE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher

With Kick Off 2 currently holding the football crown, it's a brave company that launches yet another footy game onto the market. Mind you, with the original game selling over a hundred thousand copies, maybe Krisalis are not taking such a risk after all. The player can compete in either the UEFA Cup, European Cup or the Cup Winner's Cup. Before a match the player can adjust formation, tactics and composition which due to the user-friendliness is a pretty painless process. However impatient gamers will be pleased to know that this can all be skipped.

This game is displayed in pseudo-3D which allows for some decent player animation and graphic frills. As is traditional the player nearest the ball has control, and there's a huge variety of moves available including sliding tackles, variable power shots, aftertouch, chips to the side as well as volleys, headers etc. One minor gripe is the fact that it's difficult to see where the ball is going to land due to the view point.

MU Europe isn't Kick Off 3 but it is a good footy game for those looking for something different.

****

MARTIAN DREAMS
IBM PC £36.99
Role-Playing Game
Mindscape

Imagine all the 19th Century characters that you'd most like to meet, plonk them all in an experimental spaceship, and then - for added SF interest - blast them to Mars. The result is a mesmerising blend of The FOrbidden Planet and Murder on the Orient Express with a small cast of celebrity oddballs wondering around Mars.

The player's objective is to rescue these worthies from the Red Planet. Along with companions Sigmund Freud, Dr Blood and Nikola Tesla, the player must get back to Earth (not easy with a strange and hostile planet) which entails making sense of the extinct Martians' techno-culture and discovering why they died out... or did they?

The Martian Dreams game interface is superb - the game is entirely mouse driven, although the keyboard commands can be used for shortcuts. The game is instantly playable thanks to some forethought by the programmers, because the game provides the player with enough clues to get off to a quick start. The character interaction system works very well giving the player the ability to have some quite lengthy conversations. Some really impressive graphics combined with excellent gameplay and involving scenario result in one of the better role playing games in recent years.

*****

MARVEL LAND

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Namco**

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object to is the downright badly-drawn variety sported in Namco's latest console effort. But the old dictum of never judging a book by its cover is proved right by playing this game, whereupon it becomes apparent that despite the visuals, which look like they've been produced by a pre-school child armed with a blunt crayon, Marvel Land isn't bad at all. It's a rather obvious Mario clone, and while it's not a patch on Nintendo's classic (but then what is?), it's certainly one of the better attempts. The Japanese dialogue which appears in some of the sub games takes a bit of fathoming out, but that's the standard price to be paid for playing imported games, and in this case at least it doesn't affect the fun too much. Many Megadrive owners may be offended even at the prospect of buying a game that looks this bad for their beloved technical wonder, but those who want value for money will find this to be a better bet than the flashy-looking dirge that forms a large part of the Megadrive's software base.

☆☆☆☆

MAGNETIC SCROLLS COLLECTION

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

For gamers keen to add some heavyweight adventuring to their catalogue but unwilling to fork out for the undeniably quirky Magnetic scrolls titles individually, the fascinatingly names Magnetic Scrolls collection may well prove an appealing prospect. Here we have three previously acclaimed titles, all tweaked and tuned to run on the Wonderland window system, ensuring a reasonable degree of coherence in what would otherwise be a rather diverse package. The Guild of Thieves by far the most traditional game in the set, all ancient plotting and the like, while Corruption offers a lot of moody conspiracy theorist shenanigans against a high-flying industry backdrop. Fish! is just plain odd, comprising some tricky puzzles with painful aquatic punning.

All the titles are packed with atmospheric if not actually stunning graphics which, for the benefit of purists, can be removed with a click of a switch.

Despite the difference of opinion on the Magnetic Scrolls parser (it's either the best thing since sliced bread or a wonky imitation of the Infocom system of about ten years ago) players will still find far more entertainment and scope for plot involvement than in any other game system. Worthwhile.

☆☆☆☆

MAUPITI ISLAND

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Lankhor**

The latest in a line of adventures staring fictional gallic detective Jerome Lange, Maupiti Island is a murder mystery type affair in the same vein as Delphine's excellent A Cruise for a Corpse. This effort, however, lacks much of that game's imagination and sparkle, and though there's a very complex storyline packed with clues and suspects and all set on a remote Caribbean paradise, there seems to be little to really see or do and as such, there's an uncomfortable, claustrophobic atmosphere. Given the potential offered by the plot and it's tropical setting, Maupiti Island could have been a lot more interesting and better than it actually is. And the overuse of impressive samples and poor CLI speech serves only to put the player off.

The game is presented well, with an effective menu-driven parse and neat touches. But given the somewhat unreasonable way in which the player is asked to find clues (it's more often down to finding a pixel hidden in a cluttered screen than using any deductive reasoning), it's unlikely that anyone will find much to enjoy here. Cruise is a much better bet for any would-be Maigrets out there. Great music, though.

☆☆

MEGAFORTRESS

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring. I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar?

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target. Unfortunately, for all it's gung-ho packaging and intent, Megafortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's Stealth Fighter series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, Megafortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, although it's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

MEGA LO MANIA

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Mirrorsoft**

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy Populous while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

Price **IBM PC £TBA**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Empire**

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon is none too surprisingly a sequel to MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from a mysterious set of ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the Ultima style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

MERCS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **US Gold**

While on a peace mission to central Africa the President of the United States has been kidnapped by a notorious band of heavily armed rebels. For Diplomatic reasons his recovery has to be covert with a maximum of two operatives - the player and a friend. The game is a conversion of Capcom's arcade shoot-'em-up and retains the eight-way scrolling (albeit a bit jerkily, especially on the ST).

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By virtue of two blank areas on either side of the screen, the play area has been reduced to a strip down the middle. In one player mode this is fine, but for two players, things get very crowded. The action quotient is of a very high level, with loadsa soldiers to mow down and tanks to blow up. Also nice is the ability to blast away huge chunks of the scenery with some booming explosions. If you like your action fast and frantic then this is probably for you. But if you're usually going to be playing two-player, then Core Design's Warzone is probably a better bet.

☆☆☆☆

MICROPROSE GOLF

Price **Atari ST £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

The unmistakable Microprose style comes to visit the golfing genre (we wonder why) with a reasonable amount of success. It's all extremely competent stuff but... Striking a happy medium between an arcade-orientated approach of such winners as Links and Leaderboard and their own number-friendly abilities, Microprose can offer the player the chance to fiddle around with every aspect of the game, from the size of his club right down to the positioning of his feet or how high the tee is.

Birds-eye maps of the current hole give the player a rough estimate as to what he's about, with the computerised caddy suggesting the best club for the shot. From here, the bitmapped graphics give way to workmanlike polygon landscapes and the familiar strength vs accuracy-o-meter hitting routines.

The struck ball is then followed down the course in jerky 3D until it lands and the whole business can start again.

All bases are covered and the presentation for the most part is top-hole (ho-ho!), but the big rewards are reserved for players willing to put in enough hours to perfect their golfing ability rather than instant-gratification fiends.

☆☆☆☆

MiG29M SUPER FULCRUM

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Domark**

Improving on an already successful formula, Domark have done away with many of the longevity problems of their first MiG game and have set this game against an epic backdrop of conflict in southern America. Taking the role of the pilot of a United Nations controlled MiG, the player must launch himself into hostile airspace from a solitary allied-controlled airbase - his mission is to gradually erode the stinking rebel infidels' grasp on the area by blowing up their supply lines and destroying their fuel depots.

It's bizarre that the company most recently associated with not especially excellent coin-op conversions should turn out such a classy simulation, and as a result, it may be tough for them to find the right audience. Nevertheless, a classy product it is, with a bunch of external views and a flexibility of mission structure enabling the inventive player to try his hand at planning his own strategies for doing away with the enemy threat.

Also included in this game is an implementation of the real MiG's fly-by-wire system, an auto-stabilising device which prevents the plane from flicking around all over the place like a big girl's blouse. Most handy in combat.

Presented, surprisingly enough, in polygon graphics, MiG beats the competition on the ease-of-use front, even if it is a bit tricky to imagine it outlasting some of the more intense Microprose products. A winner.

☆☆☆☆

MONOPOLY

Price **Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Money, money, money, etc. The game for budding property tycoon may well bring about a peculiarly manic feel in these recession-hit times, but Virgin's version is almost as much fun as the boardgame original; which is more than can be said for most boardgame conversions. Players must trounce around the board by rolling dice, accumulating as much cash as possible and using it to purchase squares on the board. Landing on a previously purchased square involves the unfortunate player either having to pay rent/tax/bills to either the owner of the property or the bank. Players who do the best are those who invest wisely and build houses, hotels etc on their spaces. Extra hassles are thrown up by unlucky 'Go To Jail' squares. He who ends the game with the most cash wins.

Without any unnecessarily flashy graphics, this version fairs better than most, and is refreshingly bereft of all the silly touches which softcos insist on adding to board game conversions for novelty and ruin the whole thing in the bargain.

Colourful graphics present the board in a perspective 3D rather than plan, while the computer controlled bank keeps an eye on everyone's progress. User friendly mouse control makes the player's actions over his piece's position and money-shuffling almost as easy as when playing the game in real life.

☆☆☆☆

MONSTER BUSINESS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Eclipse**

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, Monster Business is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get the the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help Monster Business rise about the pack and shine out as an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

NBA ALL-STAR CHALLENGE

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publisher **LJN**

Yet another Gameboy one-on-one basketball game. This succeeds over In Your Face by virtue of keeping all the action on one static screen and thus avoiding the terrible blurring of Jaleco's offering. In addition, there are five subgames to take part in, none of which are particularly different to 'normal' basketball but they at least at some variety. NBA requires far more skill to play than IYF because of the more complex moves which, although making it harder to learn, at least makes the game more skill based and thus more rewarding in the long run.

☆☆☆☆

NEBULUS 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like whatever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their Megadrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frus-

tration threshold was, Nebulus 2 steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

PREHISTORIK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Titus/Entertainment Int.**

Yet another game that persists in spreading the myth that the cavemen existed at the same time as the dinosaurs. This one puts the player in the role of Rik, a hairy hunter with a bottomless pit of a stomach. Rik has to guided around his flick-scrolling antediluvian world in the search for food. Rik's comestibles come in either passive (pre-killed and pre-cooked and just ready to be eaten) or active (dinosaurs that have to be whacked over the head before they can be consumed) form. It's this latter food class, along with the pits and spikes that have to be jumped, that provide the game's main obstacles. At the end of each level, assuming Rik's eaten enough, there's a boxing match against a giant dino before progress onto the next level can occur.

Prehistorik has little to recommend it in any department. The sprites are cute-ish but very small, the flick-scrolling is decidedly 8-bit and sound merely perfunctory. And considering that so little is moving on the many dull-to-get-through screens, the action is slow. The pixel-perfect nature of much of the jumping doesn't help things either. Avoid.

☆☆

RAILROAD TYCOON

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

The ACE Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage.

Meier's excellent, friendly user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Wholeheartedly recommended.

☆☆☆☆☆

ROBIN HOOD

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Millennium**

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millennium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in Populous style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sherrif of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sherrif has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy

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cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.
☆☆☆☆

RODLAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Storm**

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (Magic Pockets) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith.

Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.
☆☆☆☆

ROLLING RONNY

Price **Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Rolling Ronny is a rollerskating errand boy. He must skate around Fieldington collecting spinning gems and delivering packages for people. At the end of each set of Fieldington streets, Ronny must get on a bus and go to a different part of Fieldington to collect more gems and deliver more packages.

The player must guide Ronny around, making precision jumps in order to scale the tall buildings atop which the gems usually sit.

In it's cuteness and simplicity, Rolling Ronny is sort of like Car-Vup; lots of primary colour graphics filling in the blanks for what is effectively an extremely basic game of left/right object collecting action. Where Car-Vup failed in its control over the player's character, however, Rolling Ronny succeeds. He can twist around in mid-air, duck and jump to avoid monsters in a manner frustratingly absent from his automotive relative.

It's not until Ronny starts falling over and being pathetic that the player is reminded of quite how difficult rollerskating can be. More often than not we find little Ronny on his arse with tweety birds and stars flying around his head.

Completion of a level will result in a nice little bus trip, assuming Ronny has completed enough errands for people to earn the cash for the far. Otherwise a rather unceremonious 'Game Over' sequence ensues.

Perfectly entertaining nonsense from, surprise surprise, German coders Starbyte.
☆☆☆

R-TYPE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Activision**

R-Type was the forerunner to many of today's shoot-'em-ups, and introduced many of the features that players now take for granted in a half-decent blaster, such as power-ups and end-of-level meanies. Rather than come up with a new idea for its sequel coin-op, Irem chose to keep to much the same formula, which is not such a bad thing when you consider it.

There are six horizontally-scrolling levels, each with its own style of graphics, all of which are excellent (although ST owners may be a bit peeved by the ropey scrolling). The music is suitably spacey and polishes off the game. Being very similar to the original, one wonders whether buyers of that will want to fork out another £25 for what amounts to a jumped-up data disc of new levels. However, newcomers to the R-Type legend are in for a treat.
☆☆☆☆ (*Amiga*)
☆☆☆ (*ST*)

SARAKON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the Mah Jong tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine Snap played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible. The result? The Mah Jong player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.
☆☆☆

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99/£25.99/£29/99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Monkey Island is the latest in Lucasfilms' celebrated series of 'animated graphic adventures'. The player is Guy Threepwood, a young man intent on becoming a pirate. To do so, he must complete three mini-quests, during which the player slowly becomes involved in more and more hazardous interaction with characters both beautiful, evil and absurd. The game also contains several sub-plots, which serve to make it more enjoyable. These range from simple treasure quests to a massive objective involving a grand pirate from Hell.

The graphics are pretty impressive, using a variety of 'camera angle' such as close-ups when conversing with characters and long-shots of the landscape when Guy travels from place to place. The music adds a lot to the game, and provides real atmosphere in some scenes - the tavern owes almost all of its potency to the accompanying soundtrack. Monkey Island is easy to play due to good use of the mouse and single key commands, and along with the presentation they combine to make this an excellent game which deserves its place on the software shelf of any adventurer.
☆☆☆☆☆

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

Price **IBM PC £40.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed Their Finest Hour. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of the Second World War.

However, played in a Wing Commander style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate.

Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation.

Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from Wing Commander - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

SILENT SERVICE II

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Microprose**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. Silent Service II features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old Above Us The Waves stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

Microprose are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in F-15 Strike Eagle II would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆☆

THE SIMPSONS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

This conversion of the TV-show and marketing phenomenon which is really really funny honestly no really it's great because they're funny little cartoon characters who behave like real adults oh it's so hysterical oh ho ho really hasn't actually fared too well at the hands of Ocean.

From the coding pen of Arc Developments, this version of the NES game released by Acclaim has lost even the charm of the cartoon and on top of all that, it isn't a particularly good game either.

Space mutants have landed in the sleepy American town of Springfield and are planning to build a weapon which will help them take over the entire planet.

The player, taking the role of Bart must travel around Springfield. Basically, Bart must destroy or deface all the every day elements in Springfield which the Mutants are using to construct their space weapon.

Ocean's attempt to create something a bit more depthy than a straightforward arcade game is commendable, but the result is frustrating because the sloppy elements of game design just make it too difficult to play. It's too easy for Bart to die through no real fault of the player, and the control method is ineffective. Shame.

☆☆☆

SNEAKY SNAKES

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Rare**

From the people who used to churn out those Knightlore games (remember them) comes Sneaky Snakes, an exercise in excellent control and little depth. A female snake has been kidnapped by the Nasty Nibbler and the player taking the role of either Genghis or Atilla must explore the Nibblers hazard-laden landscape eating enough food to make them big enough to activate floor switches which open doors

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through to the later levels.

It may not sound quite as much fun as boiling one's head but actually it's not that bad. Apart from the wonky idea of the whole thing, the playing of the game is pretty good. Control over the snake is excellent and all inertia-driven. Food is obtained by bouncing on little plates which lie all over the floor or waiting around by plants which spew out balloons.

The weight of the snake is denoted by its length. Unfortunately, once he's long enough to activate the switch to go through to the next level, he's also long enough to be more easily hit and hurt by the nasty things in the landscape. Although the game never quite matches up to the quality of the control method, there's probably just enough stupid novelty value here to justify a purchase.

☆☆☆

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Sega**

Sonic is on a mission to rescue his fluffy chums from the clutches of the evil Doctor Eggman. Perils and platforms are the order of the day, but the emphasis has been placed firmly on variety too, with numerous shades of Rick Dangerous and Strider to spot along the way.

Our prickly hero can rid himself of nasties by either jumping on their heads or rolling up into a ball and spinning at supersonic speed to knock them out of his way. The most important objects in Sonic's world are gold rings. These act as a safety buffer for contact with the meanies - one touch causes all of Sonic's rings to spray out, while contact without any rings results in the loss of one of Sonic's three lives. These rings can also be traded for a life once one hundred have been collected.

Spread around each of the HUGE levels are a myriad of useful objects that deliver some temporary bonuses such as invulnerability and speed shoes.

The impressive graphics are by far the best yet seen on the Megadrive, being smooth, colourful and moving at speeds that leave you slack-jawed. Along with the sonics (Oh per-leese!) and the superb playability, this is a game that'll keep you playing until the early hours. If there's one Megadrive game you buy this year then this should be it.

☆☆☆☆☆

SPACE 1889

Price **IBM PC £TBA**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Empire**

This is an RPG which shares many similarities with Origin's Martian Dreams in both plot and user interface. However, this lacks the atmosphere and graphic quality of Origin's effort, and the plot is too linear - one often feels as though they're being lead along a fairly narrow path. It's rather simple, and could act as a good intro to the world of RPGs for the novice, but more experienced players may feel the game a little retrograde for today's gaming tastes.

☆☆☆

SUPER PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL

Price Super **Famicom £54.99 Import**
Genre Sport **Simulation**
Publisher **Jaleco**

The Great American Sport makes it onto the Famicom with a certain amount of style. A game for one or two players, it's viewed in two very different ways. When the ball is pitched, the players view the action in close-up from just behind the pitcher. The pitching player can adjust the power and angle of his pitch using the joypad. The batting player then has to strike the ball by doing similar. As the ball sails into the air the view cuts to a scrolling park view. Using the radar in the corner of the screen the pitching player has to guide one of his outfield to catch the ball, while the batting player has to decide whether to risk pushing his men round the bases one more time. Er... just like the real thing, actually.

As a simulation, Baseball is fine. The graphics are a bit rainy at times, but the all-important gameplay is marvellous - almost relaxing at times. Although a rather simple game, with the associated risk of early boredom (and at nearly sixty quid for the cartridge that's a fairly big risk), Baseball is entertaining enough to be worth consideration.

☆☆☆☆

SUPER R-TYPE

Price **Super Famicom £50 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Irem**

Apart from Gradius III, shoot-'em-ups on the Famicom are a little thin on the ground, so Super R-Type comes as a real treat. Basically it's R-Type 2 with some shiny brass knobs on. Irem has added a couple of new worlds - the first one has you blasting through a space minefield - but it's still the game we know and love. With impressive aesthetics and matching sound, it's the game Famicom owners have been waiting for.

☆☆☆☆☆

SWITCHBLADE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Gremlin**

Some seven months after appearing on the Amiga, Switchblade II - arguably one of the best arcade shoot-outs in existence - has finally made its transition onto the ST and what a success it's been!

The appeal of this sequel to Gremlin's much underrated original is the distinct Japanese flavour of the graphics. Quite aside from it having more action and weapons and playability than most, S2 features those big-eyed, black-haired characters and transformer-styled robots in a side-on multi-directional scrolling battle to the death.

Control over the central character has more than a little console-feel to it, as he bounces around all over the place firing away with his power-uppable laser rifle.

A host of different landscapes - some all broody and mechanoid, other quite sunny and happy looking - await those willing to play, each inhabited by it's own particular brand of robot filth.

Perhaps more than the graphics or the gameplay, it's the style of Switchblade which makes it such a nice game to own. Don't be fooled by the godawful cover artwork into thinking this is just another blast with no heart; it's a thoroughly polished and classy piece of code, and well worth your pennies.

☆☆☆☆☆

TAIL GATOR

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Natsume**

Slot Tail Gator into your Gameboy and you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd accidentally picked up a Game and Watch on the way out of the house instead. This Manic Miner rip off features an alligator trudging through a bunch of levels of the Moberry kingdom, trying to dispatch the monsters who have invaded.

Charly (the alligator) must flick away the monsters using his tail. Chests occasionally yield bonuses or smart bombs which will clear the entire screen of bad guys. But we all know the sort of chest that Charly is really interested in. Yes! The chests with the key which will lead him off the level.

We've really moved on from games where the entire objective is to get off the current screen by collecting a key, or at least everyone except Natsume have. For the merest instant of a second of a moment, Tail Gator looks as if it could be one of those simple-yet-addictive games which look rubbish buy play like a dream. But it isn't. So don't be fooled.

☆

THUNDERHAWK

Price **Amiga £30.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Core Design**

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks.

The game itself is broken down into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating target and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default if this seems to much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are smooth and move at a fair click, though there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim, then this is the game to change your attitude.

☆☆☆☆☆

THUNDERJAWS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Domark**

Deep within her subterranean fortress the evil Madame Q has launched a new and dastardly plan - to build an army of genetic mutants to take over the world! This well-meaning but rubbishy conversion is the latest in a long line of Tengen ports from the Doms. To be fair, the majority of the coin-ops have been a long way short of classics themselves, but Domark seem to have an especially tough time wrestling them onto computer format. Witness APB, STUN Runner and the appalling Skull and Crossbones.

Here, the tricky element which has proved to be the conversion's downfall is the tongue-in-cheek Land-of-the-Giants graphic style of the original. This very factor, which at least helped the coin-op look a bit more interesting than in fact it was, has simply made the Amiga version look downright cheap.

The players' aim is to work their way through a set of levels combating Madame Q's treacherous forces and collecting hostages along the way. The first stage pits the players in an underwater setting, shooting it out with enemy divers and ferocious sharks alike. Weapons can be collected to improve the firepower, but nothing can improve the diabolical animation and dull-as-dishwater gameplay. From here on in, it's a more straightforward runaround shoot out with the players mincing about gunning down an assortment of mechanoid assailants. Enough! Take it away!

☆

UTOPIA

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Gremlin**

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another Populous/Powermonger style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want.

The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatorship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that never works, does it?

☆☆☆☆☆

WARDNER SPECIAL

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Visco**

There seems to be a trend in current Megadrive games (Sonic excepted) to wrap superb and addictive gameplay in hideously primitive graphics.

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Wardner Special is one of this happy band. Plot-wise it's the usual rescue the girly from the evil baddy by jumpin' and fumpin' through umpteen baddy-infested levels of platforms and ladders, but it has several gameplay features that lift it out of the mire.

For a start, the amount of variety is incredible. Every step of the way seems to reveal some new obstacle or feature to overcome - spinning blades, lightning-lobbing clouds, climbable vines - which help sustain interest no end. Control over the hero is superb, allowing lots of Mario-esque mid-air manoeuvres. Probably the only major fault - apart from the terribly Master System-ish graphics - is the way the game sends the player quite a way back when he dies. Very annoying. However, this is the only real criticism of an otherwise great game.

☆☆☆☆

WING COMMANDER II

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Origin**

No matter what else you might say about the Wing Commander games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's very much a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship Tiger's Claw has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

The missions available for the player to try are wide ranging and change in style in accordance with the development of the plot. At the outset, when things are pretty quiet, the player's orders are simply to patrol, which leads in turn to sporadic fights with Kilrathi craft.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, Wing Commander II certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is one hundred percent appropriate.

☆☆☆

ZONE WARRIOR

Price **Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Destroy the evil aliens in this time-jaunting blast from Electronic Arts. The Geeks have taken control of a secret space satellite and are using it to send themselves back through time, destroying vital elements in the development of Mankind, thus disabling the humans' ability to resist the Geek invasion in years to come.

The player must race back through a host of different time zones and foil the aliens' success, generally by killing a level of left-to-right scrolling monsters.

The impressive intro sequence and the nature of the static graphics are never quite matched by what is really a rather basic shoot-em-up in the Turrican vein. Each stage presents a mission briefing for the player, beginning with the noble feat of saving Ug, inventor of the wheel, from the clutches of aliens and so on. The novelty of using a phased plasma rifle in 40 watt range to blow away innocent cave men and baffled Egyptians is entertaining enough for a while but the shaky gameplay requires a considerably stronger crutch than graphic novelty to support it.

☆☆☆

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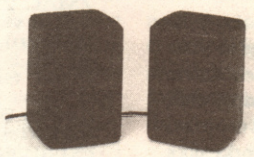

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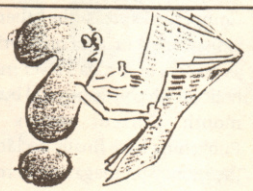

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the blitter end

Right. You've had your reviews, news, previews, tips and In The Works... what else is there...? Ah! Of course! Your monthly portion of filth, slaNder, gossip and opinion, brought to you as only the Blitter can. So let's get down to it and let's do it...

☆

The vast majority of Britain's telly-watching females were drooling profusely a couple of Sundays back as they watched the finals of The Clothes Show's amateur model of the year competition. The reason? One of the contestants was no less than chisel-jawed Bullfrog programmer Sean Cooper! Proving that programmers needn't be spotty little twerps with a blob of elastoplast over one lens of their NHS specs and an unpleasant body odour, the chisel-jawed creator of top platform game Flood was seen shaking his little toosh on the catwalk as thousandS of awestruck teenyboppers screamed their lungs out in the audience. What a hunk! Sean actually did very well, making it into the last eight hunky geezers before he was out-cooled and eliminated. We think it was something to do with the poncy purple pantalons and stupid fur-lined bowler hat they made him wear. Poor chap...

☆

Last month's "How They Used to Live" feature about what top industry bods used to do prior to being top industry bods certainly created a lot of interest. Especially from up Manchester way, where the chaps at Ocean tried to get Blitter at the wind-up by faking a letter from Sales Director Paul Patterson, exclaiming how enraged he was at being called an ex-gorillagram and how he was going to see us all in court. Ho ho! Needless to say we saw right through it and promptly dispatched a gorillagram of our own up to Ocean's Manchester HQ to put the record straight. Poor old Paul was a loss for words as the man in the hairy suit burst into a top-level meeting between him and Managing Director David Ward and started whooping and beating his chest. One-nil to us, wethinks...

Oh, and while we're on the subject, fans of last month's feature may be interested in this fascinating addition... Entertainment International's PR Manager Marisa Pauwels used to be, believe it or not, the host of the Belgian version of TV quiz favourite Play Your Cards Right! Remember, if you get 4000 points or more, you have a chance to go for the car. Wooooo...

☆

Sympathies go out to weekly rag New Computer Express (the other magazine which a mate of ours writes for, as readers of Amiga Power may have noticed) which crashes and burns this month. Current owners Future Publishing have finally decided to lay the money-pit magazine to rest after some 150 issues. It comes as a particular blow to us here at The Blitter as we always used to looked forward to Games Week, because we could never make up our own minds whether Total Recall was better than The Terminator or not. Future denies that NCE's demise was in any way connected to the appearance of a full-colour weekly games magazine called Games X which cost half the price and was lots better.

☆

Capital Radio is currently running a big promotion with Nintendo, where the prizes include NES systems, games, and as the star prize "a fabulous trip to the home of Mario - New York City!" Ahem, excuse us, but we've always laboured under the assumption that Mario was an Italian fellow. If he was a New Yorker he wouldn't have an Italian accent like he does in the cartoon, would he? So there. We phoned Mario to get a comment from the man himself, hoping that he could fax us a copy of his birth certificate to set the record straight. But he was out bashing Koopa Klowns.

☆

Here at The Blitter End we're becoming increasingly distressed by Sega's new ultra-expensive ad campaign, which is supposed to send Megadrive sales skyrocketing over Christmas. Does anybody really believe that people like that bloke in the stupid revolving chair really exist? Of course we all know that Megadrive owners drive around in a big black articulated lorry with all their Sega gear in the back - nothing odd there. What we object to is that somebody as obviously sad as he is could pull such a tasty bit of crumpet, like the one in the second advert. And even then he prefers playing his Game Gear to getting his clammy hands on her bottom. Just what is wrong with this man? And we daren't even ask about the relationship between him and his little ninja "helper", who can't be more than seven or eight. Considering he's got a dog as well, what goes on in the back of that truck after lights-out is too worrying to even contemplate...

☆

Blitter is looking forward to this year's imminent Computer Arena conference in Majorca, or some other sleazy tourist trap. All the top industry gurus gather at this tropical holiday resort every year to swim in the sea, get pissed in the bar, boogie the night away at the discos, try to get off with each other's girlfriends and, if they've got a bit of spare time at the end of it, have a quick discussion about the state of the software industry. It's all vitally important stuff, of course, and wouldn't be anywhere near as productive if it took place somewhere wet and miserable (and cheap) like Britain, where 90% of the participants actually come from. Those people who think that it's just a thinly-veiled excuse to have a cheap holiday in the sun under the guise of doing business are just jealous because they're not going. With a bit of luck, maybe next year's conference could take place on the QE2 as it winters off the coast of Port of Spain, with scantily-clad handmaidens peeling grapes and manicuring nails as the conferencers try to decide something of earth-shattering consequence, like Commodore's dealer repair policy or whether or not games should come in big boxes...

☆

It pays to have a cool head in this industry, as the editor of one of ACE's many inferior rivals discovered to their dismay last month. Not particularly pleased with the low mark given to one of their products, a representative of a major software house politely inquired to the editor of the offending organ, during a visit to its offices, why it had been treated so badly. Obviously the various pressures of deadlines, production problems had been taking their toll, and the said editor saw this as a golden opportunity to let off some steam. So he promptly erupted into a screaming fit, denouncing not only every aspect of the game itself in as foul and abusive terms as possible, but also the dress sense of the visiting software delegate! This little feet-stamping session went on for quite a while. Needless to say the software bod was less than pleased - and neither was the Ed's boss, who promptly called him into his office and game him a thorough tongue-lashing or something. It's like Blitter's always said - if you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs, you'll be a man, my son. And you won't look like a big wally, either.

☆

Hooray! That's the end. Actually, it has to be said that a lot of low-life no-good sleazoid industry scumsuckers (you know who you are) got off pretty lightly this month, but that's only because Blitter's been in a good mood, see? So just you remember to keep your noses clean - Blitter has eyes and ears everywhere. And if any readers should happen to hear of any dodgy dealings, industry scandals, write in to Blitter at the usual ACE address and let us know. Someone's got to clean the streets...

● Blit Blit!

TIP OFF

The sheer pace of the game, end to end action and tactical game play is the core of TIP OFF, a basketball simulation -

A SIMULATION WHICH IS GREAT FUN TO PLAY

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* Facility to practice skills and tactics.
* Facility to create a team at all skill levels and design tactics.
* Instinctive Joystick controls to dribble, pass, shoot or do a dummy. There are two running speeds, two types of dribbling and passing and five types of shots at the basket (Jump shot, Hook shot, Skyhook, Running Jump shot and Slam Dunk).
* Each player on the court is an individual with a unique mixture of attributes (Age, Height, Flair, Pace, Stamina and Composure) and skills (Passing, Dribbling, Stealing, Shooting and Jumping).
* Two types of Leagues. Action Replay at 3 speeds.
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